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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PEER DIALOGUE RESPONSE JOURNALS

BY

JEFF KUNTZ

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1994

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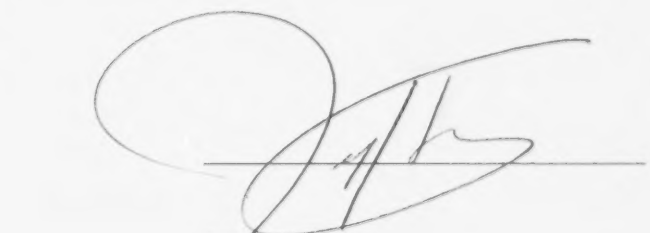

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the use of peer dialogue response journals in order to evaluate their worth and acceptability as a methodology for the discussion of literature in a classroom context. More specifically, this study was aimed at determining whether or not students, in writing to each other about literature, can help to foster growth in enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of literature.

Students from two ninth grade classrooms participated in three separate literature units in which the students were asked to read literature selections, make written responses, and exchange these written responses with a peer in order to receive written feedback. The correspondence and discussion between peers encouraged them to share and compare responses, to ask questions and promote further inquiry into the literature, and to add to each other's understanding, interpretation and appreciation of the text.

The peer dialogue response journals together with teacher researcher field notes, notes and audiotapes from conferences and interviews with the students, and written evaluations from the students provided for a detailed analysis of the peer dialogue response units. The study indicated that grade nine students respond to literature in many different ways and on many different levels (twenty one different response activities were identified in this study) and that most of the students move through a three part response process; from immediate impressions, to reflective connections and finally to distanced insights and evaluations. The study also found that peers, by sharing, comparing and questioning, could push their partners into developing and extending their responses to literature. Peer dialogue response journals, as implemented in this study, proved to be an effective way to accommodate individual differences, stimulate greater variety and depth in response, encourage enjoyment and appreciation of literature, provide practise in writing response to literature, and ease the incredible teacher workload of extensively responding to classroom sets of response journals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There were many people who gave me help and encouragement as I struggled through the writing of this thesis. I would like to single out just a few and express my heartfelt thanks.

Thanks go to all of the students who participated in this study for giving me such wonderful stuff to write about.

Thanks go to Dr. John Oster for being approachable, understanding, and encouraging. Thank you for getting me past the writing blocks and for helping me make sense out of all that data.

Thanks go to Dr. Marg Iveson and Dr. Joyce Edwards, for the encouragement and feedback you gave as committee members

Thanks go to Beverly for being the kind of teacher I could only hope to be. Thank-you for getting me started and for giving me all of that feedback!

Thanks go to Barb for keeping me on top of my registration and all of the deadlines that threatened to end my program.

Thanks go to Roger for being the technical wizard who supplied the software, hardware and expertise which made my analysis and write-up a whole lot easier.

Thanks go to Cynthia for being patient and putting up with me for the last couple of years.

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I. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Personal Context for the Study

Through my teaching experiences I have become convinced that a response-based literature curriculum allows for increased student interest and involvement, and that student journals can facilitate a better student/teacher relationship. By using student journals and by focusing on student response I have shaped a better learning environment within my own classroom; for students have come to realize that their own perceptions, whether about literature or life, are important and are to be seriously considered. But, there was a time when I wasn't always so sure.

When I started teaching I made the same mistakes that many other teachers made before me. My earliest attempts to work in a more student-centred way were limited to having the students keep personal journals (not response journals), and I handled that activity quite poorly. I gave journal writing assignments without really explaining what journal writing was, I had students do pointless and often boring exercises that were really meant to elicit "artistic" and "critical" responses, and I found myself in the rather difficult position of marking assignments from students who were confused because their teacher was confused. Some students wrote very interesting stories and critiques; while others used their journal as a forum in which they could complain about teachers, parents, peers and siblings and I, their timid young teacher, just did not know how to get these students on a more positive tack. Most students wrote little or nothing at all, partly because they felt they had nothing to write about, and partly because I had said that their journals would not be marked. Needless to say, I soon abandoned journal writing altogether.

In the summer of 1985 I took a course on teaching literature in the intermediate grades from Michael Benton and Geoff Fox. Benton and Fox gave me ideas on how to draw out student response, tap into student interests and develop individualized reader-response projects (not necessarily journals). Over the next few

years my classroom became papered over with student posters, cartoons, and board games. My shelves and closets were stuffed with scale models, sculptures, and other exciting creations. And, each one of these articles had its own history. I was amazed at the kind of effort some students put into their work even when such projects only constituted a minor portion of their final mark. This is when I really became sold on reader response; students never put in this kind of effort on worksheets. Benton and Fox gave me the tools to tap into immediate student response (projecting, picturing, identifying...) and turn these responses into artistic projects (parallel stories, colourful posters, toothpick sculptures) (Benton & Fox, 1985). The projects were sparked by details from the text, but they were not limited to these same details. My students were often encouraged to leave the world of the text and create a world of their own, and the results of their departures were delightful. But, while these activities allowed the students to explore their response to literature in a creative way, the resulting projects did little to facilitate a more analytical or critical response to their texts. Not that I minded; it was enough that these students were excited about what they had read and were ready to share it with the rest of the class in all sorts of creative ways.

Still, I did think that it was also important to push my students to re-examine the text and their response to it in order to gain a better understanding of the text itself and of the effect of the text upon them as readers. This I did through follow-up discussions and through more traditional teaching activities such as essay assignments and class debates. Never once did I think of returning to journal writing; my early attempts at journals had scared me off.

When I returned to university to start on my master's program, I started to read the work of Robert Protherough, Robert Probst, and Jack Thomson. These men have developed new insights regarding an important goal of reader response: the cultivation of a critical response. Using what I could learn from these writers, I cautiously turned back to that response vehicle that I had quietly put away hoping never to take out again: the journal. But, this time, instead of throwing my students a duo-tang and a vague topic, I decided to lead them slowly into the journalling

process. Students were encouraged to react to, to relate to, and to respond to the literature in their own journals. Then, after a dialogue process with me (written or spoken), the students were encouraged to re-evaluate and enlarge upon what they had written before. In other words, these response journals allowed students to explore their own interactions with the text and also encouraged personal one-on-one interactions with their teacher. Students could explore everything from their own personal associations to critical judgements about the text, perceived themes, and the author's world view.

But responding to all these journals presented an incredible workload for me. For a couple of years, Friday was the day that all my students handed in their journals. Many journals had numerous and quite lengthy entries. I devoted every weekend to responding to their ideas and questions; and, even at that, I always felt that I was doing a hasty and rather superficial job. Then, in the fall of 1990 while I was continuing my studies at university, I rediscovered the benefits of dialogue journals written between students. In these dialogue journals, students could write lengthy entries to each other, thereby getting immediate and extensive feedback. I was involved in teaching an introductory course in secondary education and I decided to try these peer dialogue journals with this methods class and found the results to be quite encouraging; students began to write more and more entries and became increasingly more philosophical in their entries. They gently pulled and tugged at each other's responses by writing meaningful questions and by writing some of their own reflections in the journals of their partners. This type of journal writing was not as much of a chore for the teacher; I could listen in on the conversations of my students while reading their journals and make a few suggestions to extend their thinking or move them on to another tack without feeling like I had to respond to everything they said. But, would this work as well for the teaching of literature, especially in a junior high setting? Could peer dialogue response journals be used as a tool to spark interest in their readings, stimulate critical thought and improve their reading and writing skills?

Theoretical Context for the Study

In 1938 Louise Rosenblatt wrote:

> *Fundamentally, the process of understanding a work implies a recreation of it, an attempt to grasp completely all of the sensations and concepts through which the author seeks to convey the quality of his sense of life. Each of us must make a new synthesis of these elements with his own nature, but it is essential that he assimilate those elements of experience which the author has presented.* (Rosenblatt, 1938 p.133, italics in original)

Rosenblatt's presentation of reading as an individualistic meaning-making process or transaction between a reader and a text proved to be a strong alternative to the traditional method of teaching literature (viewing the text only from a historical and social context of the author and his or her times) and the New Critical method of teaching literature (isolating the text from other contexts and searching for the "perfect" interpretation contained only within the text). While acknowledging the integral importance of the
the text and its contexts, Rosenblatt's transactional view of reading also accommodates more personal aspects of reading. Balancing the needs of the reader and the text has since become a major concern of English educators; theorists and researchers have encouraged a response-based approach by investigating and describing student response, by promoting strategies that enhance the transaction between reader and text, and by establishing critical standards by which a reader's response might be judged, and teachers all over North America have experimented with response-based activities (Farrell & Squire, 1990).

A literature response journal unit is one activity that fits well in a transactional or reader-response approach to literature. While many teaching strategies may place too much emphasis on either the reader or the text, a teaching

strategy using literature response journals can allow students to consider and reconsider their own feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and worldview while they deal with the images, emotions, ideas and points of view found in the particular text they are reading. In a summation of the benefits of literature journals Pantaleo (1994, p. 11-12) states:

> Through journal writing, students engage and participate personally with the text; reflect on evoked emotions and ideas; imagine the perspectives and experiences of others; take ownership of their reading as they write about their personal interpretations; connect and associate their prior knowledge and experiences with text; express, reflect upon and clarify their thoughts and understandings; gain self-confidence and motivation as they realize different interpretations of the text are acceptable; improve their comprehension, discussion and writing skills; become emotionally involved with literature; become cognizant of how meaning is constructed during reading because attention is directed to the thought processes revealed in the journal entries; and express individual interests, needs and concerns as they decide on the content of their entries (Cox & Many, 1992a; Crowhurst & Kooy, 1985; Fulps & Young, 1991; Kelly, 1990; Marshall, 1987; Petrosky; 1982; Wollman-Bonilla, 1989)

Literature response journals can promote an individualized recreation of the text, pushing each student to be active and accountable.

Dialogue response journals, which establish a correspondence process between student and teacher, have pushed students to be even more active and accountable in writing their responses (Atwell, 1987; Dionisio, 1991; Fuhler, 1991; Hancock, 1992). Teachers who have used a dialogue journal approach have been able to help their students by reinforcing and encouraging their students through written feedback. Using a dialogue journal format, these teachers could ask the right questions at the

right time, thereby encouraging students to re-examine not only the literature read, but also their reactions to it. Dialogue journals have helped to establish a more trusting relationship between the students and the teacher; teachers who revealed their own personal reactions to the literature in these journals often opened the door for students to do the same.

The strength of dialogue journals (individual and personal interaction with the teacher) has also proved to be a bit of a weakness. Students have felt obligated to give exaggerated responses in order to please their teacher (Corcoran, 1988) and teachers have felt overwhelmed by the task of thoughtfully and sincerely responding to several class sets of journals (Heath, 1988). A solution to both problems might be found in having students keep dialogue journals with each other. In this way the teacher need not feel so tied down by the tremendous workload of extensively responding to every student, and the student might come to see their audience as fellow student and reader and not as teacher and evaluator. Students would become accountable to each other as they worked together in negotiating interpretations and evaluations of the text. Although the students, in writing these peer dialogue response journals (hereafter referred to as PDRJs), would miss their open access to the experience and insight of their teacher, they would gain the freedom and confidence of writing to a peer.

An Overview of the Study

This study is an investigation into, a documentation of, and an evaluation of the use and effect of reader-response journals written and exchanged by students in a peer dialogue process in two grade nine classroom settings. In an effort to create open and effective dialogue about literature, I asked groups of students to respond to various pieces of literature (a novel, and a number of short stories and poems) using several different procedures for exchange and discussion. Student journals were collected, transcribed on to computer and analyzed with consideration of the type, range and

depth of response found in PDRJs. The journals were also analyzed in order to judge the effect of the dialogue process in promoting a meaningful transaction with the text. Of key importance to a fair evaluation of the PDRJs was the way in which the inquiry would be structured. What follows is a summary of the aim and design of my study.

The Research Aim

The central aim of my research was *to explore the use of peer dialogue response journals in the classroom in order to judge their worth as a methodology for the discussion of literature in a classroom setting.* In order to satisfy this aim I examined the PDRJs to determine the type, range, and depth of student response found in the journals, and investigated the dialogue exchange process and its effects on the meaning making process of individual students. More specifically the study explored how effective the dialogue process was in allowing for individual student differences, stimulating a variety in response, encouraging enjoyment, appreciation, and critical thought, improving reading and writing skills and attitudes, and easing teacher workloads without compromising the education of students. Factors that might influence the answering of these questions include: how the activity is set up, what kind of relationship is nurtured between the correspondents, the quality and range of selections used, and the expectations set out and either consciously or unconsciously implied by the teacher.

Participants and Preparation

The participants in my study were two grade nine language arts classes which met regularly (four to five times a week). The grade level is important; I wanted students who would be able to write and communicate clearly and lower levels might not be able to so as well. Grade nine is also a point when many teenagers start to see literature as more than just a few images and a nice plot. It is no small coincidence that the grade nine resource list suggests stories and novels that operate at several

levels, whereas the selections for grade seven and eight are not as multi-layered. Many students are ready for such discussion and it was hoped that the selections would provide a range of response in the journals and room for a progression of thought within these journals.

The groups used in my study were one of my own English nine classes and one class of Grade nines of an experienced colleague, Beverly Hutchens (a pseudonym). Although each of these two groups ultimately went through a different dialogue process, there were important common factors. Both groups had had some experience in response journalling and in dialogue journalling with their teacher. Both groups did the peer dialogue units (my study) as part of their regular class work and as such their efforts and progress were evaluated. Every student received an overview (oral and/or written) of the journalling process and several sheets suggesting writing starts for their journal entries. Certain ground rules were set out and routines were established in order to protect students from mischievous or mean peers, and to give students a better understanding of the time frame and expectations. And, each group was led through the process step by step in order to facilitate enough journal exchanges and enough entries on each selection.

Originally the study was intended to be done with only one group of students and only once with that group; but after running a preliminary unit on The Hobbit, it became clear to me that the process could be revised and improved. Ultimately, there were three separate trials (one group went through two units), with each subsequent trial building on the experience of the previous one.

In the unit on The Hobbit, students were simply asked to pass on their journals to their correspondent after they had finished responding to each reading. Many students decided that they were finished responding to the reading after only scribbling a hasty sentence or two into their journal and their partners did no better in writing a reply. Other students wrote and wrote and did not allow their partners time enough to make a meaningful reply. When I came to the realization that allowing the students to circulate their journals whenever they wanted rather than on a set schedule actually stifled dialogue (there were not enough exchanges going on) I

came up with an exchange process that is similar to a debate format, which helped to define the two different roles students had to take in writing their responses:

The general procedure for each group of journal writers was as follows:

1. Initial Reading

Students were asked to read or listen closely to a selection of literature (a section of the novel, a short story, or a poem). While reading or listening students who felt comfortable doing so could write their immediate reactions to the literature.

2. Initial Response (as respondent)

After the reading was finished the students were given time to finish writing their initial response to the selection. The students may already have had an idea of what to write upon but, if not, students were urged to consider some of the writing starts provided at the beginning of the unit. This step in the process was allotted anywhere from five to twenty minutes depending on the general effort and interest of the class. When the students were finished writing, the journals were passed on to correspondents (journal partners).

3. First Reply (as correspondents)

As "correspondents", the students were asked to perform a different role. Instead of responding to the literature, the students were asked to respond to the journal entry of their partners. "Correspondence" included attempts to answer questions, comparisons of response between the students and their partner's, observations and commentary on the way in which partners interacted with or interpreted the text, and questions designed to push partners into re-examining the text or responding to it. Students were to assist their partners in responding further, and they did this by showing interest in what their partner wrote and in responding to what was written in an open and honest fashion. The co-operating teachers had already modeled such positive exchanges in earlier dialogue journals.

4. Further Response (as respondents)

The students received their journals back and after reading the comments from their dialogue partners, they were encouraged to extend their initial response by

answering the questions of their journal partners or by taking their ideas on a whole new track.

5. Second Reply (as correspondents)

As before, the students' tasks were to assist their partners in extending their response.

6. Group discussion

In small groups the students were to discuss some of the issues which arose from their journals and note these for further discussion with the class. These issues took the form of questions or statements.

7. Class discussion

The students were given the opportunity to compare and contrast their responses (along with their questions and concerns) with the rest of their classmates. Generally the teacher was expected to refrain from dominating the discussion; the teacher was there merely to give input when the discussion had become sidetracked or blocked. Often, an appropriate and thought-provoking question from the teacher would accomplish much more than the teacher's critical analysis of the literature would.

8. The Final Response

Generally the students were expected to give one last impression or overview of their reaction to the literature and to the dialogue and discussion that followed.

In order to encourage a greater variety in response the students needed to make their initial reading and response with little interference from others. The hope was that they could generate their own line of thought before they might get sidetracked by peer or teacher influence. After writing some of their thoughts down they would make the first step in the sharing process, the exchange of journals with a trusted and hopefully sensitive correspondent. The next step, the group discussion, was there for a number of reasons. In the group discussions the students helped with some of the vocabulary problems or most obvious misreadings in a less threatening climate. Groups of three or four allowed each student to have input and the keeping of a log

of insights, concerns and questions allowed each small group to communicate the interests and inquiries to the class. The class discussion was meant to give more food for thought before each student made his or her final entry.

Assumptions

One assumption undergirded this research; the assumption that increased student interest and a more student-centred approach to the teaching of literature is not only desirable, it is important.

Delimitations and Limitations

I have chosen to delimit my study in four ways: by choosing to use only grade nine classes; by using a time frame of only four to six weeks for each group; by using only the journals, student and teacher reaction, and my own observations to come to any conclusions; and by not engaging in a comparative process that would have to be measured empirically.

The study was further limited by my own ability to interpret what the students had written; by the students' previous experience or inexperience with journal writing and their attitudes toward it before the dialogue process was undertaken; by the students' previous experiences in English classrooms and the methodology they experienced (as well as the philosophical underpinnings of their previous and present English teachers); and by the motivation of the students in response to the literature, the conditions and the task.

Collection, Analysis and Presentation of Response

The journals have provided the bulk of the material to be analyzed. After they had been typed into the computer I read them in order to look at the type of initial individual response, the progression of thought through individual and dialogue response, and the effect of the dialogue process on the type of response and on the depth of response. I also asked for verbal feedback from the cooperating teacher and

the student participants, especially with respect to the relative and perceived worth of the journal writing process.

General interest, growth in understanding and appreciation, the development of classroom community, and student comprehension and internalisation through personal involvement will be discussed. This discussion of the results and implications of the study will take the form of written observations using excerpts from the journals as support. As much as possible I will try to let the journals (and ultimately the students) speak for themselves.

When the students originally wrote the journals they were assured that the journals were to be a friendly and conversational forum and the style and tone of writing in the PDRJs reflect this. There were numerous instances of spelling mistakes, punctuation mistakes, unclear pronoun references and the like. In fairness to the students and in the interests of clarity, I have chosen to edit many of these "little" but annoying mistakes in order to ensure greater clarity. All of the editing done was of a superficial nature, the presentation of ideas, the sentence structure, and the wording are all as they were originally found in the journals.

The names of the participants have been changed in order to save these people from any unnecessary embarrassment or discomfort. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time; confidentiality was assured; and the proper channels for permission were all followed. Letters asking for permission were sent to the two boards involved, to the principal of each school, and to the parents of the children in the study. The study was also explained as fully as possible to the students themselves. In all, sixty-one students were asked to participate and only one chose not to allow her work to be used.

This study exploring the use of PDRJs as a methodology for the discussion of literature in grade nine classrooms, was shaped by personal and professional interests. While formulating the general aim and specific construction of the study, I drew from what I had learned through my own personal experiences and from what I had read in professsional publications. And, as the study progressed and it became apparent that

the PDRJ process need to be changed, I found myself making choices based on personal and professional insight. Practice (the realities of the classroom context) influenced many of the choices I had to make in restructuring and refining the PDRJ process. But, in making these choices, I also had to weigh what I had learned from theory and research. In the next chapter I will give an overview of the professional literature that has shaped this PDRJ study.

II. A REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

The literature review has been organized into three sections. In the first section, an orientation to reader response (more specifically "transactional criticism") is given in order to establish a philosophical context for the use of response journals. In the second section, an evaluation of a response journal approach to the teaching of literature is given in order to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach. In the third section, a careful consideration of the possible benefits and drawbacks of peer dialogue journals is made. All three sections are supported by references to the work of English educator theorists, researchers and practitioners.

"Transactional Criticism" and Other Conceptions of Reader Response

Reader response theory as first expounded by people such as Rosenblatt and Iser, has spawned a number of different approaches to the teaching of literature. Probst (1988) identifies at least three different approaches that were born out of the interest in reader response and out of a reaction to the New Critical movement in literature. These approaches are: Subjective Criticism, Structuralism, and Transactional Criticism. Probst's choice to group the predominant response approaches to literature into these areas and especially his choice to isolate "transactional criticism" from the others proves quite useful in explaining my own philosophy concerning reader response and how this philosophy affected my approach to the study.

Rosenblatt wrote:

> Through the medium of words, the text brings into the reader's consciousness certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain

> images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and occupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text.
> (1938, p.37).

This fifty six year-old text represents what is at the heart of reader response; what now might be more properly termed transactional criticism. Reader response is, above all, about the meeting of reader and text or as Rosenblatt (1938) puts it: the "transaction" between reader and text. The word "transaction" implies that both reader and text have something to share in their meaning-making meeting.

English educators who espouse a New Critical approach promote a view that allows only for an autonomous text, thereby banishing "the author and historical contexts from consideration, as well as the extra-textual experience of the reader" (Thomson, 1987 p.95) Teachers using this approach are concerned with reaching a "near perfect" reading of the text. To come to this near perfect reading, students must be taught how to respond and more importantly, how not to respond. Researchers such as Richards, Leavis and even to a certain extent Squire (1964), have used their studies on student response to show not how student response can help to create meaning, but how it can interfere with making the "right" interpretation of the text. Such an approach devalues the student's personal response and leads the student into mistakenly believing that there is only one interpretation of every text.

According to Probst (1988), most English teachers have fallen into the same trap as the New Critics; they have failed to realize the self-indulgent nature of the reading process. By devising literature programs that focus on literary information and

not literary experience they deprive their students of a fundamental experience with literature; they encourage them to bypass a crucial self-indulgent step. Probst (1988, p.7) states:

> Literature is not the private domain of an intellectual elite. It is instead the reservoir of all mankind's concerns. Although it may be studied in scholarly and professional ways, that is not its primary function. In the secondary school especially, we are not dealing with an intellectual elite, but with a representative group from the local community. We must keep clearly in mind that the literary experience is fundamentally an unmediated, private exchange between a text and a reader, and that literary history and scholarship are supplemental. Studying them may or may not contribute to our understanding of the private exchange, but it cannot be substituted for that immediate experience.

Subjective Criticism (as promoted by those like Holland and Bleich) allows for such self-indulgence; but, as both Thomson and Probst warn, perhaps such as approach allows for too much self-indulgence. Such an approach isolates the reader. The text becomes only a stimulus for subjective meditation; for exploring personal thoughts, emotions and experiences (Probst, 1988). While subjective criticism helps us to see the very personal nature of reading (reinforcing Iser's reception theory) Thomson (1987) states it has

> obvious weaknesses that would make it dangerous to use as a sole guide to the teaching of literature in schools. It does not allow for a critical faculty that can escape its own subjectivity enough to see literary significance at different levels. In its extreme form of seeing the literary work as being nothing outside the mental processes of the reader, and thus identical with the reader's mental state during the act

> of reading, it could be used to support any kind of self-indulgence or mental laziness in reading and response, and this would not be helpful in teaching. Teaching literature means trying to help students to read better. We all acknowledge that there are levels of response, and that some responses can be readily identified as being more penetrating than others, A theory which implies that one response is as good as another is certainly not going to help teachers to develop their students' reading. (p.134)

Teaching from a structuralist perspective is concerned less with the individual readers and texts and more with teaching the systems that enable readers to obtain meaning from the text. Probst (1988) states: "it can remind us that the individuality of the reader can be defined only against the background of society, in terms of it's network of structures and concepts" (p. 252). According to Thomson (1987), its systems and codes can help students to see the deep structure of literature and can help them to test their own skills in reading and find ways to strengthen these. But, although structuralism does not romanticise literature as Richards, Leavis and the New Critics do, Thomson warns us that it can lead students to see the text and their world as a little too neatly constructed. Structuralism can also lead to a devaluation of the text, when we use a text as only a tool in shaping and developing reading skills and when we fail to recognize the text as a separate work of art, something more than just the sum of its parts.

In contrast with approaches in the teaching of literature that keep the text at the centre (New Criticism) or the student at the centre (Subjective Criticism), or seek to use the text as only a tool in shaping reading, response and writing processes, the transactional approach strikes a balance by recognizing the importance of both text and the reader. In fact, most reader response critics would maintain that the meeting or transaction between reader and text should be at the centre of any approach to literature. By transacting with the text the reader breathes life into it; as Rosenblatt (1978) writes: "a novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on

paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (p.25). Conversely, the text may also breathe life into the reader by opening up a whole new world, one in which the reader may test his or her own values and perceptions against those found in the text.

Transactional criticism, as I have already intimated, comes closest to how I view the reader response process and its necessary influence on an approach to teaching literature. Transactional criticism as defined by Rosenblatt (1938) insists that "The reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence, involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader" (p.32). While the reading of a text is individual and unique it is not completely subjective; while the reader's personal associations may shape his or her response to the literature, the literature can also direct the reader's response. Texts have contexts, historical, social, and philosophical. Texts also have a limited focus dictated by many of the choices that the author has made, and by the structure and organization of the text. And there are such things as confused or mis-readings where readers, due to a lack of information, a cognitive failure or a psychological problem, come away with understandings that have little or nothing to do with the text (Purves & Beach, 1972). Transactions like these mis-readings are usually imbalanced; the reader has imposed his or her own preconceptions upon the text and failed to allow for an equal exchange of ideas.

A transactional approach can incorporate the best of all the other approaches. In seeking to maintain an effective balance between the text and the reader, a transactional approach can draw on personal associations and stimulate personal growth (as in subjective criticism). A transactional approach can also allow the reader to test his or her own response against traditional and scholarly interpretations (using the insight of the New Critics). And a transactional approach should also push the reader to continually re-examine the text, its structures and contexts in order to gain a better understanding of the text and of his or her response to it. As Rosenblatt (1938) writes:

> Though a free, uninhibited emotional reaction to a work of art or literature is an absolutely necessary condition of sound literary judgement, it is not... a sufficient condition... [The reader] can begin to achieve a sound approach to literature only when he reflects upon his response to it, when he attempts to understand what in the work and in himself produced that reaction, and when he goes on thoughtfully to modify, reject, or accept it. (p.88-89)

An Understanding of the Transaction

Rosenblatt (1938) entitled her ground-breaking book Literature as Exploration, and if we examine the quotation above it is easy to see that, for Rosenblatt, a reader's first reaction or first response is not the end of the exploration but is really just the start of it. In writing or expressing an initial response a student establishes a focal point from which he or she can start excursions into the text and explore reactions to it. Written responses (initial and follow-up) also provide teachers and researchers with a window from which to watch and analyze the transaction between reader and text. When teachers start to recognize certain elements in or factors of response, they might also come to a better understanding of how they can be better guides to the young literature explorers in their classrooms.

One of the first to investigate student response was I. A. Richards (1929). Richards completed an extensive study of the written responses of university students to thirteen poems. From his study Richards concluded that there were ten factors that appeared to interfere with "correct" understanding and judgement. These interfering factors ranged from simple comprehension problems to problems with "oversentimentality", doctrinal adhesions, and critical preconceptions. As a guide for the exploration of literature, Richards would have proven to be very strict; he was very concerned about reaching a "correct" interpretation of the text and wanted to keep his students from wandering from already established trails. As such the students

really wouldn't be explorers, they would be partakers of a caravan who were cautioned to follow the leader and keep to the path.

Among the many others who endeavoured to determine what literature explorers do was James Squire. In his 1964 study of The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories, Squire outlined six sources of difficulty in literary interpretation (the six sources had much in common with Richards' ten factors). Obviously the path to a well-considered response is plagued by stones, thorns and thistles. But Squire's description of the obstacles in response was only a minor part of his study; he was more concerned with the different ways in which the reader will respond to the literature or, in keeping with the metaphor of exploration: "What choices might the reader consider or what pathways might the reader follow in shaping his or her response to literature?" Building on the work of researchers and theorists such as Meckel, Taba, and Gunn, and drawing on the transcripts of 52 grade nine and ten students verbally responding to short stories, Squire identified seven different types of response. These seven categories of response included: literary judgements, interpretational responses, narrational reactions, associational responses, self involvement responses, prescriptive judgments, and miscellaneous responses (responses which could not be coded under another heading).

Using an analogy to an iceberg, Purves (1968) convincingly wrote that most teachers know that response is important but realize that "only a small part [of what the reader does] will become apparent to the teacher or to the student himself" (p.3). So, in an effort to map out just what a reader does when exploring or transacting with literature, he too decided to construct a model of the elements of response "capable of describing the statements, paragraphs, and essays of students, teachers and critics in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and Belgium" (p.4). Purves, together with Rippere (1968) came up with a model that included four major categories of response (engagement, perception, interpretation, and evaluation) and twenty subcategories describing one hundred and fifteen different elements of response. All these elements seemed to bear out exactly what Rosenblatt (1938) had suggested, the reading and response process is an incredibly complex one.

Others, like Protherough (1972 and 1983), Cooper & Michalak(1981), Benton & Fox (1985), and Dias & Hayhoe (1988), Hancock (1992 and 1993a and b) and Wolman-Bonilla (1989) came up with similar conceptual frameworks that describe different types of reader response. From this research and theory came a tremendous proliferation of terms and models, but if one reads each closely enough one will see parallels. Dias speaks of paraphrasing and problem solving, whereas Squire speaks of retelling and interpreting; Benton and Fox write about seeing oneself in the text and anticipating, whereas Squire writes about association, and self-involvement; in short, there is much overlap. Nevertheless, teacher researchers such Protherough, Dias, Benton and Fox have reinforced Squire's basic assertion that readers respond in many different ways and each of these researchers has given us new ideas on how to cultivate and monitor the different kinds of responses.

During the eighties, Thomson also undertook the task of discerning what readers do as they read and respond, but he took his theorizing one step further than those previously mentioned. Building on the work of Blunt (1977), Harding (1977) and Iser (1980) he developed a loose hierarchy of the types of response observed and he intimated that the more mature reader often functions on more levels and at higher levels in this hierarchy. Thomson cautioned that he was not "trying to make literary response into a measurable and marketable quantity" (p. 149) and that he did not see response as simple or linear, but while the other theorists were more concerned about the breadth or variety of response, Thomson was more focussed on the depth of response. Thomson constructed a model that outlined six developmental stages as witnessed in teenagers' responses to literature. The six stages as proposed by Thomson are: 1) unreflective interest, 2) empathising, 3) analogising, 4) reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour, 5) reviewing the whole work as the author's creation, and 6) arriving at a consciously considered relationship with the author, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self and of one's own reading processes. It is Thomson's hope that we as teachers might help students to progress from stage one readers to stage five or six readers by asking the right question at the right time and by supplying the right book at the right time to nudge our students in

their development.

Thomson's model illustrates that in contrast with a timid young scout, a seasoned, knowledgable, and resourceful literature explorer must "combine emotional involvement and cool detachment." According to Thomson, reflective detachment is the key to developing maturity. As Thomson states, it "is a matter of the utmost importance that the students be able to examine themselves and their world with some detachment, to step outside themselves and look at their experiences and feelings, as well as those of others, from another perspective beyond the immediately subjective one." (p.83)

In a similar way Bogdan (1990) and Vandergrift (1990) proposed models of response which illustrate the importance of both engagement with and detachment from the text. Bogdan's model proposes that a mature reader, when exploring a particular piece of literature comes at, transacts, or explores literature on four different levels: pre-critical (personal and almost narcissistic emotional reactions), critical (analytical responses from a spectator stance), postcritical (informed responses combining feeling and understanding), and autonomous (full undirected, literary response) (Gambell, 1986a, p.122-123). As Thomson asks teachers to help their students to come to a "consciously considered relationship with the text", Bogdan asks us to develop autonomous readers.

Vandergrift dealt with levels of response in a slightly different way. Instead of examining the different levels of response in light of a long-term development, she observed a natural progression through levels of response while readers worked through one text. Vandergrift noted that in writing and discussing their responses to a short story, her study group of ninth and tenth grade students moved from expressions of personal ideas to observations on a more objective level to combined objective and subjective responses aimed at interpreting and evaluating the story (Vandergrift, p.137).

If we as teachers are to be effective guides, we need to apply much of what has been written by reader response researchers such as those listed in this section. As Richards and Squire have taken pains to point out, there are many obstacles

(comprehension problems, faulty associations, a tendency to romanticise) that can confuse a reader. When we observe a student becoming "lost" in this way, often one little question or one relevant tid-bit of information can provide the student with enough insight to redirect his or her response.

But, while we can give our students a nudge in the right direction from time to time, our job is not to herd our young travellers along our own predetermined course of interpretation and evaluation. Students need to be placed in an active, experiential role as both readers and responders; coming too quickly with our own response will push our students to become followers instead of individual explorers. As Squire, Purves, Benton and Fox, and Protherough have proven, there are many ways to respond to a text and we should allow our students to make use of their own unique backgrounds, knowledge and skills, in order to reach their destinations.

And, what is that destination? According to Thomson, readers must come to a consciously considered relationship with the text, its author, the reader's own identity and his or her own reading processes (p. 360). Such a "consciously considered relationship" would be very different from the generic and completely text-bound interpretation desired by the New Critics. The very word "relationship" implies that there will be countless encounters resulting in a great diversity of meanings and understandings. In order to reach that destination, we need to help our students develop into "autonomous" readers; readers who can balance their emotions and instincts with insights stemming from knowledge and experience. By providing our students with texts that challenge and excite them, by allowing our students to have personal transactions with the texts, by provoking students to examine these texts from a variety of angles, by stimulating a wide range of response, and by providing students with interesting and effective forums for detailing, explaining, sharing and extending their response, we can help our students move closer to their many destinations.

Response Journals

One medium that students can use when detailing, explaining, sharing, and expanding their response to literature is the literature response journal. Parsons, in his book Response Journals (1990) explains that a response journal is "a notebook or folder in which students record their personal reactions to, questions about, and reflections on: what they read, view, listen to and discuss; [and] how they actually go about reading, viewing, listening, and discussing" (p.3). Parsons maintains that a response journal is not a repository for trite or irrelevant teenage ramblings; it is an essential learning tool which can aid in the reading process and in the formative and summative evaluation of student response (both process and product).

Although most of the research that has involved the use of response journals has been expressly directed toward the definition and explanation of student response, and not toward the investigation of a response journal methodology, the use of response journals is generally accepted as a valuable teaching methodology. Perhaps this is because the use of response journals serves as a natural extension to the implementation of Rosenblatt's transactional theory by supporting "the expression of personal thoughts, strong emotions, real-life connections, and idiosyncratic meaning making during encounters with literature" (Hancock, 1993 p.467).

Testimonies of support for the use of response journals are not hard to find. Teacher researchers like Dionisio (1991), Fuhler (1994), Fulps & Young (1991), Hancock (1992,1993), and Poe (1988) have all effectively described the benefits of using journals to elicit and develop student response. A response journal can serve as a literature explorer's log-book, recording images, questions, desires, comparisons, observations, predictions, theories and evaluations. In short, a response journal is a place where students can document their explorations and their discoveries.

Such a log-book can prove to be invaluable for most students. Most importantly the use of response journals challenges students to *personally* and *actively* describe and make meaning from their transactions with literature (Hancock 1992a).

Benton & Fox (1985) maintain that journals allow students to write their *own*

> speculations about how the story will develop, judgements, comparisons with their own experience, illustrations of characters, reflections on moments from the book, comments on how the author is telling the story and notes about their own experiences prompted by the book (p. 121).

And as Fuhler (1994) points out,

> response journals encourage thoughtful and personal engagement with a text, give students the responsibility of perpetuating and monitoring their own learning as they read and react, enable them to have a voice in their work, and empower readers to collaborate with an author as they create a uniquely personal meaning together (p. 400).

Students do not have to feel pushed into simply memorizing and retelling the teacher's or a textbook's perspective on any piece of literature; they can come at the literature in their own way and on their own level (Flitterman-King, 1988). Students doing this kind of writing engage in many different writing and thinking processes; they are involved in making a multitude of reading and writing connections. While Ingrid is coming to grips with the author's writing style, she might also be developing aspects of her own style. While Ralph is trying to figure out a certain character's motivation, he might also be gaining important personal insights. And while Patty writes in response to what she perceives as the author's world view, she might also be consolidating her own.

Response journals contain recorded impressions, valuable not only to students, who can reread their entries and trace the development of their own responses, but to teachers as well. Parsons (1990), in promoting the use of response journals, describes a number of ways in which response journals can help a teacher in implementing a

language arts or English program; among other things, response journals provide: a reference file which assists in the evaluation of individual students, a starting place from which to discuss responses in small group and class-sized discussions, material from which to guide student/teacher conferences, and an instrument for gauging interest and tracking progress in independent reading. Protherough (1972), Probst (1988), and Atwell (1985), in commenting on personal teaching experiences using journal writing, have all given similar testimonies to the value of response journals in the classroom.

But response journals are not always completely successful; there are problems too, as Corcoran (1988) has made quite clear. Corcoran quotes some students who have grown to resent reading journals or who see them as one more hoop to jump through:

> *I hate writing about books while I'm reading, because it spoils them for me. It takes away the atmosphere and makes you come back to reality.*
>
> *A journal is more of a hindrance than a help as you have to interrupt your thought flow and the continuity of the novel. Often, after writing journal entries you have to find your place, work out where you are in the novel, and then "warm up" into the story again. I personally cannot think of anything worse than being interrupted when reading, particularly when engrossed in a particular part, so eventually I become resentful toward writing the journal (and the novel).*
>
> *Often I feel I tend to over-exaggerate my thoughts in journals to make them more exciting to read. I can't help writing for the teacher's benefit when writing journals.*
>
> (p.40)

Teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of both the text and the reader and they need to be aware of the classroom and cultural contexts in which the two meet, as Corcoran warns:

> Without sensitive adaptation to the needs of particular readers or the demands of particular texts, the literature journal runs the risk of becoming yet another school genre, like a book report for the sake of a book report, or a draft for the sake of drafting.

Sensitivity to the reader and the text might involve varying the type of journal activity. Journals on novels might need an entirely different format than journals on short stories or journals on poetry. In searching for the most appropriate journalling activity a teacher may consider double entry journals (observations and interpretation of observations) (Lindberg, 1987 and Berthoff, 1981), journals built upon "key questions and spider plans" (Hamlin & Jackson, 1984), and fictional journals from a character's point of view (Tashlik, 1987).

Sensitivity to the reader and the text would also involve careful monitoring of the journal process in an attempt to foster exchanges that allow for enjoyment of the text as well as comprehension and appreciation of it. In fostering such exchanges a teacher must be prepared to give feedback. All too often teachers allow response journals to become "a book in which students write responses that are never read, never discussed, and never evaluated" or "a compendium of reactions to silent reading that has little connection with the rest of the language arts or English program" (Parsons, p.2). Teachers need to read and respond to student journals in order to promote interest and further exploration.

Dialogue Response Journals

Written comments from the teacher are of integral importance: they show that

the students responses are valued and thereby encourage the student to share more of their ideas and expressions (Fuhler, 1994). "Students' attitudes and efforts related to journal writings seem to have a direct relationship to the frequency and quality of a teacher's responses in the journals" (Calkins (1986) and Moore et al.(1986) as cited in Fuhler).

Teachers who realize how important feedback is for their students sometimes set up "dialogue response journals" in an effort to have a "frank opinionated chat" (Atwell, 1991 p.143) with their students. These journals between student and teacher should be kept informal (Fuhler, 1994; Fulps & Young, 1991) and in order to bring about a more open discussion, teacher comments "should be responses -- not a smiley face, a 'GREAT!' or an 'I agree' (Fulps & Young, 1991 p. 113). Teachers need to write extensive and thoughtful responses to their students that "affirm ideas and feelings, provide information, request information related to students' responses, model elaboration, and guide students to examine their ideas as they discover insights" (Strackbein & Tillman, 1987 and Wollman-Bonilla as cited in Fulps & Young, p. 114) As Fulps and Young point out, while teachers should model effective writing, teachers should write only in response to ideas and the depth of thinking and not to the student's "failures to approximate adult models of writing" (p.114). Too much attention to correct punctuation, usage and spelling will intimidate the student and ultimately cause the student to write less and less.

In encouraging young journal writers, teachers who use dialogue journals "should encourage expansive exploration into personal response" (Hancock, 1993 p.468). Hancock suggests we consult the work of those who have investigated the different types of response in order to develop lines of inquiry for both the student and the teacher: "striving to awaken new modes of response within the reader is the responsibility of the teacher in the role of facilitator and response guide" (Hancock, 1993, p.470). Once we have assessed the kinds of initial response students write, we can provide guidelines for response which can help them
extend or elaborate on their initial response. Such guidelines for response might take the form a sheet of helpful hints and writing starts (such as Hancock provides) or of

"well-placed nudges" personally written by the teacher for the student. As Atwell maintains, the role of a reading teacher changes when he or she uses dialogue response journals in the classroom:

> Over the last two years I've had to re-learn my role as reading teacher, I've had to put a stop to teacher talk, to spitting out questions like a computer and lecturing my kids about what they're supposed to see and appreciate in the literature they read. There is no one set of questions to ask every reader; there are, instead, individual readers with their own strategies, questions, tastes, and styles. There is no one correct way to approach or interpret a text; there are, instead, individual readers with an incredible range of prior knowledge and experience, Through the dialogue journals I've discovered alternative ways a junior high English teacher can talk to students about literature. The letters I write are personal and contextual. That is, what I say in my half of the dialogue journal comes from my knowledge of how the student reads and thinks, of what the student knows. Response grows both from what I've learned as a reader and how I hope to move the reader's thinking. (Atwell, 1987 p.178)

The interactive approach of dialogue journals opens up a discussion on literature based on genuine interest and inquiry, and helps to combat the kind of frustration, boredom or posturing Corcoran writes about.

But, at a junior or senior high level, dialogue journals between teacher and student could prove to be quite demanding on the teacher, especially if the teacher has more than one set of journals to respond to. Writing extensive and thoughtful replies on a regular basis (even once a week) in each student journal takes too much of a teacher's preparation time. In an effort to lighten their load, teachers who use dialogue journals and know the importance of feedback, have chosen to make some compromises. In responding to her eighth graders, Fuhler decided to "respond in depth

to only one of my three classes each week, merely reading and recording the current date on the remaining classes entries" (1994 p.401). Heath (1988) asked her students to select one entry a week that she would read and respond to. Other teachers have set up teacher-student conferences in order to expand on the brief jottings that they wrote in a student's journal. In all of these cases, the teacher is trying hard to maintain the kind of two-way communication that Atwell, Hancock, Strackbein & Tillman, and Wollman-Bonilla all see as crucial in helping students to expand and elaborate on their response and thereby facilitate growth in comprehension and appreciation.

Another approach that might facilitate this kind of growth in response is the use of peer dialogue response journals. Student-to-student discussion about literature fits well within the transactional approach to literature. Kletzien and Baloche (1994) have shown that, in contrast with teacher-to-student discussions which are often characterized by a teacher's (often subconscious) agenda for instruction and evaluation, student-to-student discussions promote a more open exchange of ideas and opinions. Student-to-student discussions about literature promote a more exploratory process; students are often pushed to clarify their thinking, return to the text for support, and consider alternate viewpoints. In addition, Kletzien and Baloche proved that student-to-student discussions in smaller groups also help to build a better classroom climate. Individual students gain confidence from their face-to-face interactions. These same students develop interpersonal skills and experience the accountability that successfully structured small group discussions impress upon individuals. As a group, the students learn positive interdependence in helping each other to negotiate with the text.

From small discussion groups (in pairs or triples) to peer dialogue response journals seems a logical and even automatic step, but from the paucity of literature upon this subject it appears as if only a few have tried it. Perhaps teachers are afraid that peers, in exchanging dialogue journals, will not know how to help each other in the same way that an experienced teacher may be able to help a young reader. Fellow students would probably not know the literature as well as the teacher nor

would they be as adept at encouraging their peers toward a richer variety and quality of response.

Atwell, who has some experience in using student-to-student journals, noted that students write quite differently when they write to each other rather than to the teacher (Atwell, 1987). Students writing to each other "automatically and unconsciously adjust handwriting, spelling, and punctuation to a different audience's expectations"(p. 189). But, in spite of the more casual style and the frequent digressions, student-to-student dialogues do have potential. Atwell maintains that the student-to-student dialogues in her classroom were characterized by more emotion, more playfulness, and more trust than student-to-teacher dialogues. Atwell also noted that students wrote more and longer entries than when she was their sole audience.

The difference between Atwell's experience with student-to-teacher dialogue journals and student-to-student dialogue journals gives a glimpse of what to expect from the PDRJs. While the PDRJ units may build upon what we have learned from student-to-teacher dialogues, the PDRJ units might not prove to be a better or worse activity than units built around student-to-teacher dialogue. The difference in audience will no doubt shape the correspondence and produce journals that are quite different from journals where the teacher takes a more active role. For this reason this evaluation of the PDRJ units does not focus on how they compare to student-to-teacher dialogues but instead focuses on how a student-to-student dialogue process can help or hinder students in gaining enjoyment of, understanding of, and appreciation for particular texts and their response to them.

From the literature reviewed it is easy to see a PDRJ methodology as a natural and logical extension of a transactional approach to literature. Theoretically speaking then, PDRJs should allow students to personally transact with the literature and document their initial response before refining and further developing their response through the peer dialogue forum. A PDRJ process should encourage students to write many different types of response. A PDRJ process should also help to facilitate growth in enjoyment, understanding and appreciation by providing the students with

a non-threatening forum in which to discuss and debate their own responses to literature. But theory can be a long way from practice. Often activities that teachers might assume to be exciting and interesting can fall flat because the students just don't share their teacher's interests or appreciate their teacher's approach. In the next chapter "An Analysis of the Peer Dialogue Response Journals", I will discuss the reality that sprang from the theoretical framework outlined in this chapter.

III. AN ANALYSIS OF THE PEER DIALOGUE RESPONSE JOURNALS

Restatement of the Aim

The central research aim of my study was to investigate the use of peer dialogue response journals in order to evaluate their worth and acceptability as a methodology for the discussion of literature in a classroom setting. In order to properly satisfy this aim I dealt with two major questions: "What types of response are found in the dialogue journals?" and "How does the dialogue process help or hinder the students in their search for enjoyment, comprehension, appreciation, and critical thought?"

The Range and Depth of Response

The Peer Dialogue Response Journals (PDRJs) yielded a rich variety of response - more than I was initially prepared for. Students jotted down sensory impressions, asked questions of detail and inference, made personal and textual comparisons, and offered insights and analysis. The fact that students kept journals with each other instead of with the teacher actually broadened the type of response found for there was immediate feedback from a less intimidating correspondent than a teacher might be. Although the entries the students wrote to each other were more playful and less careful than the entries they had written to their teacher in earlier units, the students were quite focussed on their task and there were only a few instances of idle banter about home, homework, or afterschool plans. In fact, most of the students took these journals quite seriously and used them as a forum to discuss, analyze and criticize the literature.

In the student journals, there was a wide range both in breadth and in depth of response. At first, when sorting through the journals, I attempted to use the terminology and groupings found in Squire's categories of response in order to describe what I found in these journals, but I had to abandon this procedure. Squire's seven categories simply didn't seem to have room enough for many of the responses I found. Next, I attempted to use Thomson's model as a basis for terms and groupings, but I had to abandon this model also. While Thomson's six stages allowed for both types and levels of response, I found it rested too heavily on the aspect of long-term development to be useful for such short units as I had planned. Thomson's levels five and six were almost unattainable for a grade nine student. I needed a terminology that could describe the variety in the types of response I found in the journals and that could relate the difference between the depths of response I found (from simple reactions and associations to carefully contemplated evaluations). So I went through the journals again, this time in order to come up with a "new" classification system for the types of response that I found in these dialogue journals; but I was unable to distance myself from what I had already read in Squire, Purves, Dias, Thomson, and Benton and Fox. In the end, I came up with a classification system that works for this study; it looks suspiciously like a cross between Squire and Thomson with a dash of the other authors thrown in for good measure:

Elements of Response Found in the Peer Dialogue Response Journals of Three Grade Nine Classes

Process	Response types	Response activities
A. Immediate Impressions		
	Primary Response	
		a) picturing
		b) retelling
		c) anticipating
		d) literal questioning

Emotional Response

a) liking/disliking
b) empathising/disdaining
c) hoping/desiring
d) other reactions

B. Reflective Connections

Comparative Response

a) personal comparisons
b) textual comparisons
c) character comparisons
d) other comparisons

Analytic Response

a) interrogating the text
b) observations
c) putting it together

C. Insights and Evaluations

Interpretive Response

a) predicting
b) theorizing

Summative Response

a) recognizing deeper structures
b) presenting conclusions
(personal and critical)

Although, as I have already said, the model above has quite a bit in common with Thomson's model there are significant differences.

1. Thomson's model focussed on stages of development over a longer period of time (reminiscent of Piaget's steps in cognitive development), while my model is just meant to classify the different types of response. My study centres on the response processes of groups over just a four to

six week period; this time constraint would most certainly hinder a study of development as Thomson sees it.

2. My model differentiates between three main parts of the response process: immediate, reflective, and evaluative. From reading the journals it became apparent that many students do these three kinds of response and they usually do them in the order that I have given, although a re-reading of the literature might spark the cycle anew. For instance, in responding to Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" a number of students first engaged in visualising the two roads and the wooded surroundings and some made remarks about places they had been before. Then, after reading most, if not all, of the poem these same students realised that Frost could be speaking metaphorically, and that the roads might also represent choices. As they struggled to make sense of a deeper meaning they made personal comparisons and they re-examined the text for further clues to test some of the ideas they or their journal partner had about the poem. Finally, when it came to writing what they knew would be their last journal entry about the poem, these same students often gave some type of evaluation or judgement based on what they experienced in reading and responding to the poem.

Not all of the students went through such a straight-forward process, but many did. Some students, however, could not give more reflective or evaluative responses by the end of each exchange cycle; they were still wrestling with literal meaning or were still wrapped up in the emotions provoked by the poem or story. Other students apparently jumped straight from reading to reflection and evaluation, but, in follow-up discussions it became apparent that these students did have immediate responses; they just felt that these immediate impressions were not worth noting and that what was really important was analysis and judgement.

> Obviously the dialogue journal exchange process did much to influence this progression from spontaneous to carefully considered thought, but there is also reason to believe that this process from immediate to reflective to evaluative response is something that students do all the time and that in jumping immediately to evaluative type questions, we teachers often short-circuit the students' meaning-making process and instead unintentionally force them to simply accept our own analysis and evaluation.

But perhaps I am stealing some of my own thunder; suffice it to say that the model that I eventually settled on could convey the tremendous variety of response and show some of the development in response that I evidenced in these journals. In order to properly discuss the importance of each type of response to the meaning making process, I will give a more detailed explanation of the range of response found in the PDRJs using the terminology model as an organizational guide. In order to provide clarity and focus, most of the examples used in clarifying these terms have been taken from the first set of journals; the ones on The Hobbit. Please note, many of the examples used in this discussion of the different types of response contain more than one kind of response activity. The fact is that the students moved very quickly and easily from one type of response activity to another. In an effort to give a more complete picture of the students and their responses, I have chosen not to break up the responses into little fragments.

Immediate Impressions

Included in "immediate impressions" are the kinds of activities the readers did almost unconsciously. While only some students chose to relate these immediate impressions in their journals and many others did not, it was nevertheless, still very evident that all of the students had an immediate response of one sort or another. (This came out in later interviews.)

Primary Response

There were a number of different response activities that I eventually grouped under the heading of primary response activities. These activities (picturing, retelling, anticipating, and literal questioning) were all essential to the process of "getting into the story"; they allowed each reader to comprehend or self-clarify the basic details of plot, setting and character. They were a kind of "first step" in the enjoyment and comprehension process. The journal entries which displayed these kinds of response activities were often nothing more than a series of noted impressions or questions that occurred to readers as they read the selection or more often, as they heard the selection read to them. As I have already said, not all of the student journals contained such entries; some students could not be bothered with writing in their journals until they had finished reading (or hearing) the selection and had time to think about it, but in the subsequent interviews it became apparent that nearly all of the students engaged in some or all of these activities.

a) picturing

When I read I see this all happen. I make a little movie and picture everything too.
Miriam

I think Laketown is a small village. It is surrounded by tall and jagged mountains and cliffs. The front of it is long lake crystal clear a deep blue. It is a perfect picture.
Ardyth

When a student related some type of visualization relating to the story or poem, I classified it as "picturing" (borrowing a term used by Benton and Fox). This kind of response activity might include relating prominent colours,

What is that red glow? Is it Smaug? It probably is, then Smaug will wake up very grumpy and then Bilbo will have to fight him. Smaug looks like the dragon you see in cartoons. He is green (bright green) and scaly with a dull yellow belly, he has an arrow type tail, and red fiery eyes, he has little itty, bitty wings. He has an alligator type mouth and when he sleeps he snores and breathes smoke.
Leila

describing the setting or the characters,

The forest is made of mostly huge oaks. There is a canopy of leaves above them vines and leaves are everywhere. Here and there a snake can be seen slithering in the trees. Everything is dark it is something like the forest in the Princess Bride. If it is so dark how can they stay on the path?
Ardyth

I think the Goblins are ugly green things with 4 fingers and claws, red eyes, like coals, a hunch back and tremendously big mouths and huge teeth
Leila

or even making rough drawings or maps.

Making "movies and pictures in your mind", as Miriam puts it, was very important for understanding and enjoying the text. Picturing was also a very personal activity, for there were significant differences between the students as to how they visualized certain characters and settings. Early in the unit some of the students had appealed to me, as an "authority" on the text in order to come to a consensus on exactly what Bilbo or Gandalf looked like; but eventually, with a little coaxing, these same students became a little more confident in their own abilities to picture. Soon The Hobbit journals became a forum where students fought about whether or not

Goblins looked human, or whether Elrond's house was just a cottage or a big hall. In arguing, these students appealed to the text and to a number of Tolkien calendars displayed around the classroom; but the text details were not always as concrete as they would have liked it to be and different artists had drawn the same events and characters in completely different ways. The only time the students agreed was when they viewed the film; then they all agreed that the film was nothing like how they had imagined the book.

b) retelling

The hobbit is going under the dragon spell when Bilbo thinks the dwarves are going to leave and take the gold without him. The dragon's influence is still working on Bilbo; he can't seem to shake the feeling that the dwarves are going to rob him. Bilbo almost always is right. I'll bet Bilbo is going to come up with a fantastic plan. He will probably end up killing Smaug himself.
Ardyth
I think the dream he had in the cave was what happened. The crack in the wall opened so the goblins could take the ponies away. To get out of the mountain they will have go quite a ways. Maybe when they get back to the outside they will have gone past the Misty Mountains.
Ardyth

Students who repeat the details of the story with little commentary or reaction are "retelling". Some students needed to recap the details of the story, especially in their first entry, presumably to make sure that they didn't miss anything. If they did miss an element or two, or if they confused the order of events or misunderstood words or actions, their partner would often point this out. Other students, like Ardyth in the two entries above, retold the story in order to lead up to a prediction or insight. But most of the students who rewrote the story were simply filling in

space because they were stuck for things to write; they hoped that their rewriting of the story might spark a topic. Sometimes it did.

c) anticipating

Will Smaug get Bilbo? Will Bilbo hide the golden cup? Will Bombur and Bofur be saved? Will they get the ponies back? or will they be killed? Man, Smaug is mean! I knew he would be mean but not that mean!! I wonder if he's going to become Bilbo's friend; I doubt it because then how will they get the treasure?
Leila

This kind of looking forward, also found in earlier passages quoted from Ardyth's journal and from Leila's journal, was more predominantly found in The Hobbit journals because the students had time to become attached to Bilbo and the dwarves. This sense of anticipation was further heightened by the fact that early in the novel various songs are sung and legends are revealed that hint or even explain what will happen. We know that Thorin will claim his position of "King under the Mountain"; we just don't know how. Anticipating was not found as much in the journals on short stories and poems (the last three sets) for most of the students chose to write their responses only after they had finished the whole piece of literature.

The PDRJs contained many more examples of anticipation than student-to-teacher journals. Students were more comfortable sounding out these questions to a peer who was just as far in the text as they were rather than to a teacher who had read the text many times before. They were interested in comparing their anticipatory reactions with those of their peer.

d) questioning

For some students language was a real barrier. These readers often asked for

help in their journals so that their partner might clarify words or even details of the plot.

> *The author said the goblins "went as quiet as bats" but bats are noisy. Aren't they?*
> *Ellis*
>
> Bats aren't very noisy. Only when you arouse them. Usually they fly silently and you never hear them.
> Toby

Whether or not these questions were answered depended to quite an extent on who the student had as correspondent. Some students continually asked and answered questions in each other's journals, scribbling in answers in the margins, in between lines, or as numbered responses in their journal entries. These students began to write longer and more involved journal entries as the process went on. Other students, who saw themselves as teacher (asking questions like: "What do you think of Tolkien's use of language?"), often glossed over their correspondents more basic questions and in so doing left them even more bewildered than before. And some students simply ignored the questions of their partner and wrote vague replies like "Good entry Danny!" Earl, when asked by Janet why he had not responded to her questions, simply answered "because your questions are stupid" (even though most were quite good). Students like Oscar, with their apparent lack of interest, missed the opportunity to start on a meaningful dialogue and the result was shorter and less imaginative entries from their partners. Obviously not all students are as sensitive and helpful as their teachers, and, some students might add, "Why should I be... it's not my job!"

Emotional Response

It seemed to me that an immediate response concerned only with the comprehension of detail was different from those that were coloured by emotional reactions. In an emotional reaction the readers gave evidence that they had reached some level of comprehension and that what they had read had affected them. Still, these emotional responses could not be seen as anything more than immediate in that they came unsolicited, often in response to nothing more than a well-placed word by the author.

a) liking/ disliking

The things the dwarves say are so neat; like little kids. I really like them. They are so stubborn and sometimes sarcastic. It's really neat.
Maureen

When a customer in a bookshop picks up a recent novel and skims the dust-jacket and the first few paragraphs in order to make a quick evaluation, he bases his decision about whether to read it on little more than whether or not the book has caught his attention. Students participating in this study were seldom allowed to make that kind of choice but that didn't stop them from giving their quick judgements. Phrases like "that was cool", "this is a stupid story" or "why do we have to read this stuff?" with little else to clarify them were found in more than a few journals. Most often (in the Poplar Ridge journals anyway) these kinds of comments were found in the journals of those who had a limited range of reading interests and were unwilling to read a different type of story.

Still, the aspect of liking or disliking the text, a character in the text, or an aspect regarding the text proved to be an integral part of the whole meaning-making process for some students. Take for instance this response to characterization:

I don't like Thorin. He seems like too much of a know-it-all and is always trying to take leadership. I think Bilbo does a much better job then Thorin. Thorin is also a wimp. He always makes Bilbo take the risks instead of doing the dangerous stuff himself. There was no great loss when he died.
Dan

Towards the end of his journal Dan started to move from more immediate affective responses to appraisals of Tolkien's use of characterization and discussions on Thorin's character transformation on his deathbed. Generally liking or disliking a character often led to questions as to why and then to insights regarding the author's intentions and craft.

Most of the negative comments came in the journals on short stories and poems. Often the negative comments revealed something more than dissatisfaction; they revealed frustration and confusion. Some of the teacher-chosen short stories and poems were difficult for students because the philosophic thrust was too subtle. Students complained that the story was dumb because it didn't seem to have an ending or because it was too confusing. Some, but by no means all, of these students changed their minds after a few exchanges with their partners or after a class discussion. These "negative responses" proved to be quite enlightening; from them I discovered some of the hidden obstacles that hindered students from appreciating or even enjoying some of the selections.

While "Liking/Disliking" is an immediate type of evaluation, it is not necessarily valuing. Many students did not like the story "On The Sidewalk Bleeding" because of the unwillingness of the passersby to help the fallen gang member angered and frustrated them, but they valued the story quite highly for they felt it had a lot to say about identity and bigotry.

b) empathising/disdaining

Readers who projected themselves into the story soon found themselves

empathising with one character or another.

> *Poor Bilbo I think I would be tired of adventure if I had to go through all this. I wonder if he will ever get restless and wish himself on another one. How will the Shire be? Will it have changed? Will his relatives have taken it over or will it be silent and dusty? Will the first thing he does is go look for pocket handkerchiefs? Or will he already have a supply of them provided by the dwarves? All his food will be spoiled. Unless it was all eaten by the dwarves for tea and supper and breakfast. That seems long ago. Will his friends accept him as before? Will he still be a respectable hobbit? Or will he be considered queer like the Brandybucks across the Brandywine river? Will his old life after adventure seem dull and boring?*
> *Ardyth*

In this last entry Ardyth imagines what it would be like to be Bilbo returning after his long adventure with the dwarves. It is not the first time that she empathises with the characters. Some of her other entries started with similar phrases: "*Poor Bombur he must be so squashed...*" or "*I pity the twelve dwarves...*" Oddly enough, even though The Hobbit was an incredibly popular book with these students, Ardyth was one of the few who came so far as to empathize with characters on a regular basis. Perhaps the fantastic setting and characters were difficult for most of the students to relate to. Several of the short stories, though, produced quite different results. "On The Sidewalk Bleeding" and "Golden Girl", two stories with teenage characters in difficult circumstances, elicited journal entries that were quite introspective. This does not mean that the literature with "teenage themes" was found to be more engaging and therefore more successful than the other selections, but teen stories did bring about more of a personal and emotional type of response.

Sometimes students conveyed less empathy and more disdain. "When Bilbo thinks of his little hobbit hole I feel that I should grab him and ring his neck out

until he forgets about his hole" was just one of the responses from a number of boys and girls who thought Bilbo should stop mooning over his hobbit hole, his handkerchief, and his tea and cakes.

When partners discovered that they had experienced the same reactions to the text and the characters, it often led them to discuss whether or not the author had intended for them to react in the way that they did, and if so, why.

c) hoping/ desiring

I think Bilbo should have received more of a reward for all his work. He did a lot of things for Thorin and he didn't get much in return. In all the adventures they had Bilbo seemed to be the leader. He was the one who got them out of a lot of trouble. If it wasn't for Bilbo they wouldn't of got to the mountain and Thorin wouldn't have become the new king under the mountain.

Thorin is going to die. I know he is he will not recover. He called Bilbo and stayed alive for him to ask him for his forgiveness of what he said to him. It's not fair; he deserved the battle but not to die. Bilbo cries, that's nice... well not nice but most people and heirs and warriors would not be overcome by sadness. If I would have read the book by myself I would be crying too.

Miriam

Some students communicated their emotions by expressing wishes. The two most common wishes were that Bilbo would slay the dragon in The Hobbit (he didn't), and that Andy would not die in "On the Sidewalk Bleeding" (he did). Squire would call such responses "Happiness Binding" and would maintain that these responses display an "unwillingness to face the realities of unpleasant interpretations" and a "demand for fairy tale solutions." These wishes would be seen as sources of difficulty in literary interpretation. But, after reading entries like these I came to a

different conclusion. For the students who had not expected and certainly not prepared for the death of so many dwarves, and who expressed their wish that it had not been so, the loss of the dwarves was greater and so was impact of that passage of the book. Justifying the deaths in literary and artistic terms (as so many teachers have learned to do with Romeo and Juliet) may, in fact, take away from the experience and enjoyment of the text.

Many of the wishes the students made had to do with the choices the author made in writing the text:

> *I think it would have been more exciting if Tolkien would have kept talking about the battle. Instead of stopping when Bilbo got hit. And continuing later.*
> *Ellis*

> *Stop describing; I want to hear what the dwarves and Bilbo say. I don't want it told to me, I want them, the characters, to say something.*
> *Miriam*

These wishes provided an excellent opportunity to discuss the craft of writing and the differences found in individual reading styles.

d) other reactions

> *The people must have seen the dragon coming. Something is slowing. Oh no it is the dragon, he is come to kill them; the helpless, defenceless, unaware, poor people. That's not fair, the people didn't upset the dragon. It's not fair, it's not fair. I wish I could tell the people to run for shelter from all the evil and death. Maybe the people will injure him making him weak or maybe the people will kill him. Bilbo must see this from the lookout if it was like fireworks. The dragon is mighty and powerful. There will be no glory*

for Bilbo but dreadfully hatred by the people. The hollow if it is shot in he (the dragon) will die or be seriously hurt. The black arrow would hit him. It was "lucky" It did! The dragon died or maybe he still is alive. They should cut him up to make sure he is dead. Bard will become very great. He will be honored.
Miriam

Some of the more emotional responses were hard to describe or label as Miriam's rather spontaneous entry above illustrates. In this entry she expresses empathies, concerns, and wishes which could be put under one of the other headings. But she also expresses her horror, grief, and joy, and a host of other emotions. Entries like Miriam's were few; in order not to have too many groupings I have lumped all of them together in spite of the obvious range of response.

The Hobbit journals proved to have more of the immediate type of response and after reading the journals the reasons became very apparent:

1. Short stories and poems are read quickly; it was more convenient for the students to wait until a story was finished and then write a more reflective response than it was to write immediate impressions while they were reading it.
2. The Hobbit in comparison to most of the stories and poems used in the other response units, was not as "deep" a read. Most of the stories and poems built upon characterization in order to emphasize an important theme or idea. Students soon became involved in interpreting the story rather than reacting to it and so many of the first entries started with the phrase: "The meaning of this story is...".
3. Since it is a fantasy novel, The Hobbit contains significant amounts of description. In order to "get into the novel" students were forced to try and picture the strange little inhabitants of Middle Earth and their surroundings.

But while The Hobbit journals may have contained more examples of "primary

response" the journals on short stories and poems also contained a significant number of instances.

Reflective Connections

Most of the response activities in the first section, Immediate Impressions, have to do with comprehension and reaction; both of which are essential to the process of getting into the story. The focus of this second section has more to do with connections and realisations: activities with come from a sustained transaction or involvement with the story.

Comparative Response

Jack Thomson would call this particular type of response analogising; I prefer the broader term: "comparison" This term gives room for some responses that could not be described or classified elsewhere.

a) personal comparisons

Gandalf has a tall blue hat with white stars on it with a matching cloak. He has pointed ears like Spock and has a long white beard and he is very thin. Dad will look like that when he is old (even without the costume) Miriam

In some respects this type of response activity is an extension of empathising; students might empathize with certain characters because they have experienced some of the same feelings, and have run into some of the same problems. But the kinds of responses that I eventually came to see as personal comparisons were characterised by more than feelings of sympathy or disdain, these responses showed that connections were being made, and with these connections often came realisations.

The elves are extremely amusing. They are jovial, happy, and friendly.

They are sarcastically friendly and I really liked their song. They always act like they have one up on everyone. I can see in the future the dwarves and elves fighting and arguing like brothers and sisters. They are sort of competitive. The elves are pesty and annoying and remind me of my brother. They obviously get on the nerves of conservative Thorin and his dwarves. Thorin is a little too serious. He could lighten up a bit. The elves are irritating and obnoxious but in a cute way. My mom might call them real "stinkers".
Maureen

b) textual comparisons

We as teachers often select stories and poems that have similar themes or conflicts in order to spark discussion on style or philosophical direction. Sometimes the students made similar connections.

The dragon is probably big and breathes fire. Maybe he can go to other places by thought (like books I've read Dragon Sword by Anne McCaffrey). Maybe he lives near Magma so it will look like hell with all the darkness. It would not be surprising.
Miriam

In one journal entry Henry voiced his disgust at the seemingly cliche story line in "The Sniper." He felt that the street fight where a soldier ends up killing his brother was just too overworked. Henry's background in reading many war stories gave him a different perception than the rest of his class, most of whom were quite surprised by the ending. Some of the students who were quite interested in fantasy kept citing how The Hobbit had much in common with other series they had read, and hinted that they thought Tolkien might have stolen some of his ideas from Terry Brooks. When they later found out that Tolkien was one of the very first

fantasy writers of this sort they became more interested and some even attempted to read The Silmarillion, Tolkien's history of Middle Earth (a very difficult read), in order to find out more about Tolkien's ideas and how they influenced later writers.

c) character comparisons

There were numerous instances in The Hobbit journals where dialogue partners chose to discuss and compare pairings of characters. Many students chose to compare Beorn and Gandalf, citing the fact that both characters could work powerful magic and that both seemed too mysterious to be completely trusted. Closely linked to these character comparisons were character contrasts. In the unit on The Hobbit many of the students singled out Bilbo and Thorin as character foils. In contrasting the two characters most of the dialogue pairings came to the consensus that Thorin was too greedy, too conceited, and too bossy while Bilbo was too content (not at all adventurous), too timid, and too polite. Readers who were able to make these kinds of comparisons came closer to understanding their own emotional reactions and the text.

Analytic Response

Students who learned to look for the author's perspective or who liked to criticize stories in accordance with their own philosophical slant first needed to see if they could find any patterns and try to put the pieces together. I like to think of this particular type of response as being the huh? (interrogating), oh! (observing) and aha! (putting it all together) part of response.

> *Sometimes I analyze the characters by saying that was a good idea or that was a dumb thing to do. I watched the change of Bilbo in this book. He grew up and became a quick thinker. And at the end when Bilbo said his friends could drop in at any time; in the beginning (of the book) he would have been angry if they had come unannounced.*

Miriam

a) interrogating the text

In responding to "The Weapon", many students wrote questions like:

> *What exactly is "the weapon" meant by the title?*
> *Why did the author include a reference to Chicken Little?*
> *What is the significance of the last line? ("only a madman would give a loaded revolver to an idiot.")*

These students were involved in a process Thomson called "interrogating the text." The questions they asked (and ultimately tried to answer) were more than the low level comprehension questions I have classified earlier under primary response; they were questions that moved the students closer to a central theme. Obviously, an adventure novel or quest like The Hobbit led to fewer of these deeper questions than the more loaded short stories.

b) Observations

> *I like the book so far. The story is extremely descriptive. I like Bilbo. He wants to be adventurous but holds back so he won't be different from other hobbits. He really is dealing with a struggle within himself. Part of him seems intrigued with the idea of adventure while another part seems fearful of it and holds back. Description is used well- eg. You know Gandalf is a wizard before it is stated flat out that he is. Thorin is a little too self-confident. I think if he gets into any situation he will over-estimate his abilities and get into more trouble, although his brains could be useful for planning and strategy ahead of time.*

Maureen

In this excerpt Maureen gives an observation about Bilbo and his struggle within. She has noticed two different sides to Bilbo: an adventurous one and a timid one. Later on she discusses how Bilbo's struggle is a common one; so Maureen's observations led to a conclusion about Tolkien's craft and purpose in constructing Bilbo's character. Many of the observations students made were coupled with questions such as "Andy seems awfully concerned with removing his jacket, I wonder why?" In The Hobbit journals most of the observations were about Tolkien's writing style or his use of characterization:

> *You can tell the story is going to go for a long time because the author keeps saying Bilbo wished for his home not for the last time.*
> *Ellis*

> *Tolkien says things differently when he wrote "just when the dwarves hopes were lowest" Usually writers write "just when they were about to give up" I like Tolkien's way a lot better.*
> *Ellis*

c) putting it together

Closely linked to the interrogative process is what I call "putting it together." For instance, in the case of the response on "The Weapon," once the students had decided that the reference to Chicken Little was important, that the weapon was more than just the gun mentioned in the story, and that the last line carried the central message in the story, they were ready to put together some of the more important pieces of the story. This "putting it together" eventually led to a few informal conclusions about what the story was intended to present, what the story meant to them and whether or not it had been an interesting and entertaining read.

In The Hobbit journals most of the analysis came in the later entries. By then the students had the opportunity to stand back and see how all of the adventures added up for Gandalf, Bilbo, and the Dwarves.

> *Bilbo, throughout the story has earned more and more the trust and admiration of the dwarves. All the dwarves have throughout the story become indebted to Bilbo one way or another. Even Thorin with the spiders web. When Thorin was to throw Bilbo over the wall, Bilbo was hardly getting a fitting reward for all that he had done. For without Bilbo Thorin would not be alive to have the treasure or to see the Arkenstone.*
> *Ardyth*

> *I think that all the adventures that they are having are not by accident, but are meant to be there. I think that ever since the dwarves came with their song, that it spoke about these adventures. I'm sure Gandalf knows that. He probably knew what to expect on their journey, that might be the reason why he was there for the dwarves and Bilbo just in the nick of time.*
> *Wendy*

One of Wendy's observations gave her quite a shock:

> *It was like a movie where you see and hear everything and just want to jump into it because it is a good movie. The voices given to the characters give you an idea what type of person, dwarf, elf, lakeman, goblin, hobbit, etc...he is. Hey wait a minute, I just realised everybody in this book was a guy! No girls whatsoever! Just because girls aren't strong doesn't mean there cannot be female characters!*
>
> *Is Tolkien a male chauvinist? According to some of the guys in our class females are weak, unimportant, and possessions of men. Well I think that's Bullshit!! Sorry for my language there, but you did say write down*

what you feel. The fact that Tolkien did not have any female characters, is dumb, because females are important, where else did all the male elves, dwarves, etc...come from. Ardyth said this exactly right! No further comment.
Wendy

Distanced Insights and Evaluations

Interpretive Response

Each student may have formulated his or her own interpretation of the text based on reading, response, peer dialogue process, and group conversations. With their "insights and evaluations" the students revealed the fact that there is quite a range of ability and aptitude at a grade nine level. Some students made very hasty or confused interpretations based on little more than a feeling. (There were some really strange ideas about who killed whom in the responses to "Night Drive") Others did a great deal of interrogation and put together quite a solid hypothesis (as many of the students from Poplar Ridge did when they responded to "the Weapon" or "On the Sidewalk Bleeding" in their second PDRJ unit).

a) predicting

Bilbo will go home. Maybe he will have someone come live with him. Maybe he will be called Thorin's spirit to another younger and Thorin will instruct Bilbo and Bilbo will be able to see him. Like at the end of the Star Wars trilogy when he saw OB1-kenobe, Yoda and his father and Thorin will give inspiration to Bilbo as OB1 did to Luke when he was in the swamps in Return of the Jedi.
Miriam

Thorin will die I think. He is too stubborn. He will never agree to the

terms he is too greedy. The lust of gold is to great in him. Thorin is wrong.
Ardyth

Predicting, as I have used the term, is a different activity than anticipating. In predicting, the student draws upon clues found in the story and in his earlier responses and uses these clues to draw a conclusion; anticipating is merely looking forward with interest. Predictions were basically the applications of what the students had already "put together." When Ardyth, after hearing the first section of "The Battle of Five Armies" in The Hobbit, decided that Thorin would undoubtedly die in order to pay for his greed and stubbornness, she made a prediction based upon her knowledge of Thorin and her general assessment of him, and upon her understanding of literary conventions.

There were a lot of predictions made in The Hobbit journals; students were continually looking forward and in a sense they were writing the story just as Tolkien had forty-five or so years earlier. They made their assumptions based on their own ideas about how things should be and when they were different from how the book turned out they had the opportunity to ask themselves why:

The novel is not at all turning out as I expected. I thought that Bilbo would just leave the travellers party and go back to his "warm cosy hobbit hole which he missed so much. When Bilbo agreed to go along, I knew he would cause some problems. I knew he would miss his hobbit hole at one point in time, I just didn't know he would miss it that much. In the end when they have the battle I knew something was going to happen to Thorin, but I didn't know he was going to die. I thought that Thorin would be lying on his bed, and then Bilbo would come in and feel bad and then he would get the arkenstone back for Thorin. The only major difference in the book was that I thought Smaug would be lying at the entrance of the mountain and Bilbo would use the ring to get in, but he didn't and Smaug was not at the entrance of the mountain, he was rather in the middle. I think now that the

adventure is over. Bilbo will go home but he will probably get into another little adventure on the way. Is Gandalf going home with him? Because if he is, I don't think they'll meet too much on the way, I don't know, I think it's just Gandalf's presence that makes me think that.
Leila

b) theorising

Bilbo meets Gandalf. I wonder if Gandalf had been following the dwarves and Bilbo all along. I have a feeling he has been just to see what Bilbo and the dwarves would do without him. I like the way Tolkien puts all the characters all together in the end.
Ellis

Predicting might be considered to be one element of theorizing but theorizing could also be general statements about what the author intends to say with the poem, whether or not the author has based his story on a true life experience and the like. There were more examples of theorising in the journals on short stories and poems than there were on The Hobbit. Often the students would base an elaborate theory on a few small details found in the text. In the following entry Wendy tries to read a little more into Ted Hughes' poem "The Stag":

I think the author might be trying to tell his readers about our world. (verse 5, last line) When the stag went into a strange world it weemed like the trees and brambles were attacking it as if it wasn't wanted. Nowadays there are a lot of people who come from a country of their own to live in a strange land, but just like the stag they are not wanted.(racism) Who knows!
Wendy

"The Stag" provoked quite a few interesting theories on what the author was trying to

say and whether or not the stag represented something more than an animal in flight. Wendy volunteered her theory about "The Stag" in her first reply to Ian, but Ian quickly dismissed it:

> *Wendy,*
> *I don't think this poem is about racism. The stag was chased into the strange land, he didn't go there because he wanted to. The stag didn't want to leave his forest. He was forced to leave by the hunters.*
> *Scott*

Exchanges like these often helped students to test, reinforce or dismiss their theories and provided much of the material needed to make personal and critical conclusions about the literature they discussed.

Summative Response

The third part of the process that the students seemed to follow while responding in their PDRJs was the formulation of a summative or distanced response. In such a response the student often drew upon his or her own immediate impressions and reflective connections and upon the feedback from correspondence and class discussions in order to make a more distanced analysis and evaluation of the literature. Evaluations based on a quick reading and a few negative or positive impressions were not seen as summative responses. Statements such as: "I thought it was boring" or "This story sucks; it didn't have enough action," needed to be substantiated with more information; otherwise they were interpreted as immediate and emotional responses.

a) recognizing deeper structures

Many students, in writing about the literature, discovered some of the

underlying devices that the author used in building and shaping his or her work of fiction. Students who were conscious of the role that unity and economy play in making an effective poem or short story often pieced together themes using their knowledge of devices like literary patterns, allusions, and metaphors. A good example of this "piecing together" of structure was found in Maureen's very first response to "On The Sidewalk Bleeding".

> *The boy lost his own identity because of the group or gang he belonged to. He was no longer seen as a person or as Andy, just a royal. The person who killed him did not know him enough to like him or hate him, he just hated Royals. The boy was labelled because of the gang he was in. What shocks me is how Freddie and Angela leave him in the alley. They know he is dying. How can they live with themselves knowing they could have saved him and yet choose not to because they were worried about themselves? I would have gotten some help even if it was only by an anonymous phone call for an ambulance or police. They could have made this phone call but they chose not to. In a way what they did is no better than the person who stabbed Andy. He knew he was killing Andy and Freddie and Angela know they were leaving him to die. It seems like it took Andy's death to even make himself see that he is Andy not just a Royal. He does not even think he's dying in the beginning. He must have seen a lot and had a rough life to accept this as normal. Even though Andy is in a gang, he is a person. We can see this when he talks about Laura.*

After using her knowledge of deeper structures, and suggesting a central theme dealing with identity, Maureen went one step further and suggested one possible view of the story as an allusion to Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

> *When Andy dies Laura too sees him as a person. The cop just sees him as a Royal, a gang death but he does not seem to think of Andy as a person.*

What could the names Royals and Guardians mean? This might be a little far fetched but Andy could symbolize Christ in his purple(royal) jacket. Freddie and Angela remind me of Pontius Pilate. They know what they are doing is wrong but they do it because they are afraid of getting into trouble. They only think of themselves. Pontius was also willing to sacrifice a "person's" life for his own benefit. Andy also felt the need to take off his jacket because he wanted to be known as himself not a royal. How royal is Andy? He died in a deep dark alley; this is not how royalty lives or dies. What kind of Guardian is the person who killed Andy? A guardian is supposed to protect isn't he?
Maureen

Although Maureen's suggestion that Andy is a Christ figure is a little far-fetched, the fact that Maureen is able to make such an application shows that she has paid close attention to many of the factors that have shaped the construction of the story. Maureen recognizes that Andy's jacket, the names of the rival gangs, and the actions of the passersby all add up to a more important message about identity and personal responsibility.

b) presenting conclusions

Some students, after a wrestling with the literature came to some very personal insights or conclusions. These personal statements might take the form of realisations, applications or evaluations.

In her last entry on "The Sniper" Paula shared three important personal realisations (about snipers, about Ireland and about sharing response) with her dialogue partners and her teacher.

Well, now I've learned what a real sniper is, before I didn't really know. It's somebody who lays flat, high on a roof, during a war, and shoots other

people. He has a good chance of getting the people too, because he can see them. I agree with Louise, too. Somebody who shoots innocent people is a psycho. Anyways, I've learned a lot about Ireland, and now fully understand what the whole story was about, now that you've explained it. I wrote the same thing mainly for Henry and Louise because I wanted to see how they responded in different ways. That made for very interesting comments. As I already said, I agreed with a lot of what Louise said. And what Henry said, that was interesting. He found what I wrote interesting. I like writing things that really make people think, talk about different opinions. Anyways I enjoyed reading "The Sniper", and am looking forward to reading the next selections also.
Paula

Other students applied lessons from the literature to their own lives as Beatrice did in her response to "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

This poem is really well written. It explains the story of life. Meaning that it tells us that there's two paths in life the path less travelled and the path that is well travelled. I think people should take the path less travelled because then they are doing what they want to do instead of what someone else wants you to do. I think that the ones who take the well travelled path are followers and they don't really know what they want to do with there lives. Also it tells me in the poem that you can't turn back. So once you've chose the path you want to take and you've started to take that path you can't turn back. It shows that you have to make up your mind in what you want to do and not what someone else wants you to do. I think that the key word is "you". It's what you want. If you choose the path most travelled then you are letting someone else choose you life and when you take the path less travelled then you are making decisions for yourself. Well at least that's my opinion of the story.

Beatrice

In extending this application Beatrice and her partners, Cole and Melanie, wrote about numerous decisions that teens must make. Through their PDRJs entries on this story the trio discussed drugs, alcohol, designated driver programs, and suicide and stressed the need for teens not to be unthinking followers.

Most of the personal conclusions made by the students were retrospective statements about what they observed, learned and liked about the text.

> *Yes, I definitely would want to read more from Tolkien. Because I like the way he describes everything to it's last detail. And the way he plays with his words, he doesn't ramble on and on but keeps you interested. What really interested me in his writing, was the way he talks to his readers. It's like he's there with you and telling you a story but goes back to talk to you. I really enjoyed this book. Which I find amazing!*
> *Wendy*

> *The Hobbit was a very entertaining book. I normally didn't like fantasy but this was very interesting. Tolkien made you get into the book by the way he writes. He has a very special way of writing, he plays with the words, and he likes using beats or rhyming.*
> *Tolkien also likes to use humour, "The trolls just couldn't decide what to do with the dwarves...to mince them, to roast them and eat them later or to sit on them and turn them into jelly". He also uses lists, "and he jumped and he hopped and he skipped".*
> *Leila*

Like Wendy and Leila, many students gave specifics from the poems and stories to support personal evaluations. As such it would not be hard to call such evaluations critical conclusions as well as personal conclusions. But sometimes there were

students who made a clear distinction between what they thought of a text personally and what they thought of it critically. For example, several students thought that "On The Sidewalk Bleeding" was a well-written story with an important message, but they really didn't like the story because of the violence and the unhappy ending.

Once again it must be stressed that the response process, as shown through student writings in the PDRJs, is not a lock-step process. When responding to the novel or to the short stories and poems, the students did not always experience an easy and automatic progression from immediate impressions, to reflective connections and finally to distanced insights and evaluations. Some students hardly moved past immediate impressions while others jumped straight into insights and evaluations when they wrote their initial response. But, for most of the students most of the time, there was a general progression that began with trying to get into the literature (immediate impressions) and followed with becoming immersed in the literature (reflective connections) and ended with standing back and viewing the literature and the experience of reading the literature from a distance (insights and evaluations).

The Influence of the Dialogue Exchange Process

In this next section I will discuss the effects of the dialogue exchange process on the range, quality and depth of response. But before I can describe the circumstances of each of the individual groups, I must first explain what is meant by "growth" in response.

Growth in Response

Consider the following three responses to "The Rockinghorse Winner" by D.H. Lawrence:

I liked the general idea that the author was working with but the actual story wasn't all that great. I thought it dragged too much at times and could have had more to it.

My favourite part was the end when the boy died. I knew it was going to happen but I still liked it.

Oscar

The mother came across as sort of a bag, because she had a cold place in her heart. I thought that this place in her heart was the place that she feels money is more important. She was also very insecure. She had dark longish hair, and for some reason, she was always wearing light blue or green. Her face was creamy smooth, with thin lips and dark eyes. The rockinghorse was almost evil looking, with dark paint and fierce eyes. The house itself was huge, with a yard and many trees.

The rockinghorse was almost an obsession with the boy. He only wanted to prove his mother wrong, and show her that he was very lucky. The voices in the house was because the more money the mother received, the more she wanted and desired money. The children picked up on these voices because kids have always been receptive to things adults never see and take for granted. The children saw that money was slowly becoming more important to their parents than they were.

I didn't put myself in the story, I never do. I'm always an onlooker and observer, but never a participant. The thing I didn't understand is why the boy got his inspiration from the rockinghorse. The only reason I can think of is because the boy used the horse as an excuse. He actually found the answer out himself, even if it was unconscious. He was driven by the need to have more money to please his mother, so he would rock on the horse until he knew the answer.

Patricia

There was a message brought out to me while I read the story. I felt like it had something to do with Satanism, not luck. At the end, there was this boy on a horse yelling out "Malabar". It doesn't sound like he's saying it but something evil was coming through him. He claimed that God was talking to him, I did not believe that but I did believe that someone is doing so.

The story reminded me of a game where you contact spirits to answer your questions. The game called Ouija board.

Since this kid had problems understanding what luck is really all about and his parents didn't really have the love to give him. Also the gambling habit ran in the family. It felt like someone who died as a gambler was contacted by him.

Susan

It would be impossible to classify each of these responses as only in one category, as each has in it elements of many different type of response, but if you had to make a general classification Oscar's response can be seen as an evaluative judgement, whereas Patricia's and Susan's responses would seen as impressions or mental images. Does this make Oscar's response more valuable or worthwhile than the other two? Certainly not, for Oscar has given us little reason to believe that he has done any thinking about the story, whereas Patricia's and Susan's responses show a definite search to make sense of the story.

This difference between Oscar's, Patricia's and Susan's responses illustrates one of the reasons why I decided to stay away from an empirical study where each response is classified and then charted. Instead I decided to look at how students extend and question their own responses while helping others to do the same. The thrust then is not in achievement in comparison to some type of external rule or measure, but on personal growth in making sense of each selection, in making sense of their own reactions to the selections and in coming to use their own response processes in order to enhance their enjoyment and critical appreciation of literature.

A key to this growth is the dialogue process. In a student/teacher dialogue a

student may soon grow to appreciate the teacher's comments be they personal response, gentle prodding with a few well-placed questions, or reasoned and sincere encouragement. A student/student dialogue may seem less restrictive because the writer may not feel the constant eye of an evaluative audience, but it could in fact be more restrictive. Students often are stuck for words and may open up more to a trusted adult than to a peer with whom they could lose face. Respondents may not see the opportunities to question as an experienced teacher might. These respondents might not think of asking Oscar to explain what he thought Lawrence's general idea was, or to pinpoint parts of the story that dragged and suggest improvements. So, in order for this project to have had a chance at success, correspondents needed to be taught about dialoguing; not so that they all learn to write and respond in exactly the same way, but in order that they may be able to have a chance to effectively encourage a more sophisticated response; one that shows growth in enjoyment, comprehension, appreciation, and/or critical thinking.
Growth might be evidenced in a number of different ways:

1. A student may grow or develop in one particular type of response. For example, he may get better at relating the images that come to mind while he is reading and may even get better at paying attention to description and better at visualizing the characters and the setting by the end of the unit.
2. A student may begin to look at the story in different ways and may end up writing different kinds of responses rather than always the same kind of response. For example, the student who usually writes quick judgements ("I didn't like that story... there wasn't enough action") might be pulled into conversations about characterization and meaning. In the end this student might actually start his journal entries with observations on these elements.
3. A student may learn to use his reading and response to come closer to what Thomson calls a "consciously considered relationship with the text." Students who have previously complained about not understanding stories, may, with the help of their dialogue partner, learn to put the pieces together

and make a more informed response to the story. This student would momentarily be moving up a stage or two on Thomson's model.

Keeping in mind these three different types of growth in personal and critical response, we will now take a closer look at each of the journal contexts in this research.

The Three Trials

As I have said already, I have observed and/or conducted three separate PDRJ units. Each of these units was significant in its own right and each was instrumental in developing a workable approach to journalling in PDRJs. But, two studies, done with the same fifteen students, gave the clearest evidence of the successes and failures of a PDRJ approach to the teaching of literature. It is for this reason that I have chosen to focus on the two Poplar Ridge 1992 studies in summarizing the results of my inquiry. The other study, Willowdale 1992, will be described only in as much as it shaped and refined the dialogue process.

Poplar Ridge '92, "The Hobbit" (January 16 - March 6)

I attempted the first of the peer-dialogue journal units in my own classroom. Instead of focusing on shorter pieces of literature (as was the original intention for my study) I decided to focus on one major work of fiction, The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien. This book was one of the most influential in my own adolescent reading experience; by it and through it I became "hooked on reading" and I hoped to do the same for my class.

As it was already close to the third and final term of the year and as our budget had most certainly all been spent, I could not afford to buy a class set of this novel. Instead I chose to work on my class's listening skills by reading the novel aloud. My grade six teacher, Mrs. Kelsey, had done the same, and had kept her class

spellbound while she read using various voices and accents. Her reading not only made the characters come alive but also brought out the rhythms and the gentle humour found in Tolkien's writing. I could only hope to do the same.

In 1992 my grade nine English class numbered 15, and it was a joy to teach this small and talkative class. The class consisted of nine boys and six girls of various interests and abilities. Some of the students were top-notch readers and writers, while others hated to read, or confined themselves to reading material that was heavy on plot and little else. The same range could also be evidenced in their writing preferences. As we will see later on, the differences in the students were mirrored in the differences found in their responses.

After outlining some of the choices available for this unit, I let the students choose their own groups and their own system of dialoguing. It would be their first experience with dialogue journals and I wanted them to be comfortable with their immediate audience. The six girls broke into three groups of two, using a simple back and forth method of exchange.

The nine boys broke into three groups of three and followed a similar process, but the journals were passed in more of a triangular fashion. For example: Peter wrote to Dennis, Dennis wrote to Dan, and Dan wrote to Peter. This exchange process also added perspectives; what Dennis read in Peter's journal could give him something to write about in his own journal to Dan.

My original intention was to read to my class for only a period or two a week while continuing on with the regular program I was teaching. This practice soon fell away though, as the students became so interested that they begged for more "Hobbit periods", and I bowed to their pressure. In general we fell into this pattern: I would read aloud for the first fifteen to twenty-five minutes of each forty minute class. While I was reading students could doodle, jot rough notes, or write full fledged journal entries. Most chose to just listen, because they found that they missed parts if they started to write. After I finished the reading for the day the students would start on the journalling process in earnest. I set only one rule: that there would be little talk and that whispering would only be allowed if it was to explain something in the

journal to a partner. It was our intention to have the journals go back and forth twice after each reading but this didn't always happen. Some students wrote quite lengthy responses and so had only one or two entries written before we moved on to the next round of reading and response. Others rushed their writing and it showed. And still others just simply did not know what to write. A few of the students (usually the ones who wrote lengthy entries to start with) took their journals home, but most did not. The unit, from start to finish using anywhere from two to five periods a week, lasted six weeks (mid-January to early March)

While the students were writing I had hoped to keep up my own journal, reflecting on the reading of the day, noting the interest levels of the students, and remarking on what I read in the student journals. Very soon though it became apparent that I would have to write in my journal outside of class time, as I was needed to wander the classroom in order to help students in writing. Three or four students were always stuck and constantly complained about not knowing what to write. For at least one of these "blocked writers" the complaining was an attention grabber; this student had lots to say if you spoke to her but was somewhat insecure and wanted to write the "right" things. Several other "blocked writers" very simply had little to say; this was also borne out by their regular class work. It was difficult to coax more than a paragraph from each at the best of times.

In fairness to the students, I must say that I had given them little to work with other than the text. I expected that all of the students would be able to listen to a reading of the text and then immediately and very spontaneously write a response to it. I found that some students were incredibly uncomfortable with this kind of freedom and wanted some kind of hint or help to get them going. In the next PDRJ unit with this class the students would receive sheets with writing starts on them such as:

I really like/dislike this part because..

The character I most admire is...

If I could talk to (name of character) at this point in the story, I would tell

him/her...

For most of the PDRJ unit on The Hobbit, the students were given a few suggestions only when they specifically asked for help. It was only when we came to the second last reading that I gave the students a handout with specific questions and specific expectations:

The Hobbit: Final Assignment

Tonight I expect you to write at least several pages as a cumulative assignment. Here are some questions to work with if you are stuck for things to write about:

1. Is the novel turning out as you expected it would? What are the differences and similarities between your expectations and reality?
2. What parts of the book did you like best and why?
3. Would you read more from this author?
4. If you are presently reading The Lord of The Rings tell me which of the two books you like best and why.
5. What do you think of Balin, Beorn, Thorin, Gandalf and/ or Bilbo?
6. What did you like best about Tolkien's writing: word play, story line, characterization, description, humor, or action? Explain.
7. How will the story end?
8. Are you reading more or less this year? Why?
9. Did you enjoy journalling?
   How could the journalling process be improved?
   What should I do for next year?
10. Did the readings help or impede you in getting into the story and in getting something out of the story?
11. What kinds of things did you do (picture, predict, analyze...) when you were listening to the novel and when you were writing about the novel?
11. What kind of major project are you prepared to do on this book?

As I have already said, there were really two different exchange processes going on in the classroom at the same time; the girls opted for a straight back and forth exchange between two, while the boys used the more complicated three-way exchange. What follows is a more thorough description of just what happened in each of these two types of groups.

The Pairs

The three pairings of girls writing to each other were Ardyth and Wendy, Miriam and Maureen, and Leila and Nancy. These girls had all been in the same class for some time and had built up close friendships, so all of their journals are marked by an easy confidence. The girls had open and frank discussions in their journals; they were not afraid to write nor were they trying to impress each other. But, while all of the PDRJs shared between the pairs were characterized by honest and lengthy dialogues, it does not follow that they were all quite similar. In fact each pairing seemed to establish its own focus and its own tone. For this reason I have chosen to relate some of the most important similarities and differences between the pairings by giving a brief description of each pairing.

Ardyth and Wendy

Ardyth and Wendy were most concerned with the world of the dwarves and the hobbit and with the progress of the adventure. Like almost all of the "hobbit" groups, much of the dialogue between these two girls was limited to "immediate impressions." In the early entries both Ardyth and Wendy strove to make sense of "Middle Earth" (Tolkien's setting). Once they had come to terms with such a fantastic world and allowed themselves to flee into the novel, Ardyth and Wendy turned their attention to the plot of the novel, asking questions about what happens next and making predictions about how the novel might end. Here is an example of an entry which shows the girls' interest in both the world of and the adventure of Bilbo and the dwarves:

I wonder what adventures await them in the forest. Are Hobgoblins the same as goblins? Its the Necromancer Sauron? Gandalf doesn't seem to think there is much of a chance for the party to go through the forest alive. The forest is mostly made of huge oaks. There is a canopy of leaves above them vines and leaves are everywhere. Here and there a snake can be seen slithering in the trees. Everything is dark; it is something like the forest in The Princess Bride. If it is so dark how can they stay on the path? The big eyes I think are Gollum's eyes. What are the spider webs made from? Will they encounter it? It must be huge if it is a spider. Will the web ever get on the path? They are coming toward the end of Mirkwood. Why is the wind sad? Is the laughter elves?

Ardyth

I think this group is already off the path ever since crossing the stream. The laughter could be elves, but I can only see the trees haunting them, with their laughter. I'm sure they will encounter the spiders because they have to have some sort of adventure in Mirkwood, plus look at the title,"Spiders and flies". Princess Bride does remind about the Mirkwood forest, but I can relate to more movies or books with each adventure.

Wendy

In this excerpt both Ardyth and Wendy move easily and quickly from one type of response to another. In her response to the text Ardyth anticipates, questions, observes, pictures, and makes textual comparisons. Wendy does her best to try and answer some of Ardyth's questions, but since she is only as far in the novel as Ardyth she can only guess too. Wendy does make a very astute observation about the title of the chapter, though.

Both Wendy and Ardyth were hearing The Hobbit for the first time (although by this point Ardyth started to read The Lord Of The Rings) and gives the dialogue a different feel than if the dialogue were between teacher and student. As much as we

teachers might try, we cannot converse as these two girls have done. Students would be hesitant to ask their teacher questions about how the adventure will turn out, for they don't really want to find out... at least not in that way. And the teacher's knowledge of the text and of the students, as well as the ever-present shadow of evaluation would serve only to stiffen the conversation. Towards the end of their respective journals, both Ardyth and Wendy started to compare and analyze more. Observations on the maturational growth of Bilbo and on the pride and arrogance of Thorin, led to predictions on how the story will end and on just what the best ending would be. Although the book didn't end quite the way they wanted it to, they could reconcile themselves to Tolkien's ending and in explaining how they were reconciled to it they used their skills of analysis (in judging characters and their motivations) and interpretation (in determining Tolkien's creative purpose).

This pairing's progress through the different types of response was by no means atypical. Most of the "hobbit" groups followed a similar pattern. The progress in the "hobbit" journals loosely follows the model that I have laid out in the previous chapter. Generally speaking, the first few responses in almost every journal contained a cache of immediate impressions (making sense of the novel, its setting and its characters) with only a few connections and insights. By the fourth or fifth entries though, the emphasis had changed. By this point most of the students were sufficiently involved to start pulling for Bilbo and the dwarves, so the journal entries contained more comparisons and predictions. And, when the novel began drawing to a close, the students began to examine the novel as a whole and they presented their conclusions and insights in their journal entries.

Where Ardyth and Wendy differed from many of the other groupings (especially from the boys) was in how they connected with each other. Both of these girls made sure that they at least acknowledged each other's questions even if they were not in a position to answer them.

> *I agree on your point about Baggins. I think it would be very boring to visit him. They might have elephants in this story. I mean, they've already had*

trolls and Goblins and Hobbits. This story is very unpredictable. I don't believe Bilbo is cut out for his task either, he's not a very good thief at all. Maybe he'll change later in the story. I think the Tookish blood will come out if something happens to one of his companions. I don't think the song is telling about the adventure because there is no way that they could figure out what is going to happen to him unless Gandalf can look into the future. I don't think Gandalf is a real wizard, one reason for this is exactly what you said; if he is a real wizard why couldn't he get them there faster?

Wendy responding to Ardyth

In this entry Wendy shows what it really means to be a "co"respondent. As Ardyth's teacher I would have a tough time with some of her questions for I couldn't pretend to have read only as much of the story as she had. I couldn't experience those same first-time feelings of curiosity and anticipation; instead, about the only things I could write back would be comments like "Oh, you think so, eh?" or "Excellent observation." In my experience, students often find the smug little comments the teacher has made in their journal to be more patronizing than up-building.

Ardyth and Wendy sometimes kept a dialogue going for several passes as in the following sequence:

Would Bilbo get hypothermia? Will someone see him? If they did I don't think they would see much. He probably looks like a drowned dog. I think he still has his ring on. That would look funny seeing footsteps appear on the floor and drops of water falling off of thin air. Poor Bombur; he must be so squashed in the barrel! He must be hungry. I wonder if he ever will get hungry enough to eat whatever was used to pack him in. Would they run out of air in the barrel? Is there is a hole in the barrel? Would water drown them before they reach the end of their road? Are the mountains "frowning" a premonition of danger and peril yet to come? Can Bilbo steer the barrels? How will Bilbo and the dwarves get past the men? I think

Thorin is back to his old self. I think the dragon will come to Laketown. What does the leader look like? The gold in the song must be the dragon's hoard that they came to rob. What about the other dwarves? The hobbit has begun to be thanked by the other dwarves. I think Laketown is a small village. It is surrounded by tall and jagged mountains and cliffs. The front of it is long lake crystal clear a deep blue. It is a perfect picture. I think they will find the secret gate and will enter the passage. This is the safest way because Smaug can't reach them this way. I think Bilbo will go down into his hoard. It is a dimly lit huge hall. The floor is covered with gold coins and jewels. These are so plentiful you cannot count them. Jewels of red, blue, green, purple and countless other colours. There is also an abundance of pearls. Most of these jewels are set in gold or silver rings chains, or bracelets. There are many chests filled with other treasure that may have no material value but have a significant place in the history of Middle Earth. Bilbo will stand in the middle of this vast treasure house of forgotten treasures. He will be dazed from the sight of them. Smaug will come when he is in the middle of it. Bilbo will have no choice but the fight with his elven sword sting. He will slay the dragon or injure it and the dwarves will come to help. One might die but I think something will happen to Thorin. The dragon will die, they will take his treasures and Laketown will find it's songs have come true. Thorin will become the king of the mountain and will have riches and honour. He will reign as the people said and the Hobbit will go home with some treasure. And that will be the end of his adventures until Frodo comes along. That is what I think will happen.

Ardyth

You know, that sounds like a Teddy Ruxpin scene! I think that when they get into the mountain Smog will be there at the entrance, then if they can sneak past him there is a moveable rock and if they push it they will enter this room and then there's a Teddy Ruxpin scene.

Wendy

I think you're wrong. In the story it said they would go by a secret entrance not by the front door. I think the only other entry is the top of the mountain. If they could climb up there and got inside. When they hit the ground they would be flatter than a pancake when they reached the ground, falling or jumping from that height.

Ardyth

Oh...well S...O...R...R...Y!!!!!!!!!!

Wendy

While the interplay between the two girls might not seem all that sensitive or even all that "deep," the girls did engage in open and frank discussion in their journals. Such discussion led to longer and more involved entries; each girl knew that the other was reading what she was writing and that she was willing to respond to the other. By the end of the unit (by the end of the novel) both girls could write extensive entries if given enough time to do so.

Maureen and Miriam

Maureen and Miriam have been good friends since childhood and have been known to spend hours on the phone with one another, so it was no surprise when their journals turned out to be among the longest in this class. But although Maureen and Miriam share many interests, they are quite different from one another. Maureen has always been a straight A student; Miriam struggles to get B's. Maureen writes smoothly and clearly; Miriam has always struggled with spelling, punctuation, and capitalization and so her writing is almost indecipherable. Maureen hadn't really read much fantasy literature before this unit; Miriam had read quite a bit.

The differences in ability and interest provided for some very interesting discussions between the two. Maureen was mostly interested in the characters and how they developed throughout the story. Her interest is very apparent in her very first entry:

I like the book so far. The story is extremely descriptive. I like Bilbo. He wants to be adventurous but holds back so he won't be different from other hobbits. He really is dealing with a struggle within himself. Part of him seems intrigued with the idea of adventure while another part seems fearful of it and holds back. Description is used well - eg. You know Gandalf is a wizard before it is stated flat out that he is. Thorin is a little too self confident. I think if he gets into any situation he will over estimate his abilities and get into more trouble although his brains could be useful for planning and strategy ahead of time.

Maureen

In this initial entry Maureen shows just what a perceptive reader she is. She has already identified Bilbo's inner conflict, she has found Thorin's "tragic flaw" and she has noticed Tolkien's rich use of description. While Wendy, Ardyth, Nancy and a few others were suspicious of Gandalf (choosing to see him through Bilbo's eyes) Maureen could step back from the literature and see that Gandalf was a true wizard and that Tolkien has chosen to present him this way in order to create a little mystery. In terms of her maturity as a reader, Maureen would be further along in Thomson's response model than most of her classmates. In later entries Maureen would continue her analysis of Thorin, Bilbo and Gandalf and their relationships with one another as in this entry (her fourteenth):

Who will take control of the mountain? Do the elves and goblins want the mountain or just the riches? The thrush is an important key. He helps them and those in laketown by warning them. The thrush gets a raven so they can understand him. Thorin is greedy. He should make peace but he refuses. How can he use all that gold anyway? They support their mountain and fill a moat and try to secure their riches. Don't the dwarves feel guilty for the pain and loss suffered by the people of laketown? I would. Poor Bilbo did not want them to fight. Those people(at least some of

them) helped the dwarves on their journey. Bard is right. He shows Thorin that he forgot everyone who helped him. Thorin and the dwarves should not be so greedy. Thorin is a jerk at the end. He is cruel and greedy. He reminds me of Scrooge. He is so wealthy and he ignores those who help him. Bilbo is nice but he should return the large jewel or arkenstone he took. I think he will give the arkenstone to the elves and Bard so they can bargain with Thorin to get their share.

Maureen

This excerpt shows the wide range of response a student can go through when writing to a peer about literature. In this excerpt Maureen anticipates the coming battle, questions the motives of the elves and goblins, retells a few key details, empathizes with Bilbo, Bard and the people of Laketown, disdains the conduct of Thorin, compares Thorin to Scrooge, and predicts that Bilbo will "do the right thing" on the basis of her knowledge of Bilbo to this point in the novel.

Although Maureen was quite frustrated with Thorin she could forgive him, as this excerpt from her final journal entry shows:

Thorin - he was an interesting dwarf. I liked him because he was sort of funny. He acted sort of snobby and better than everyone else but when there was a sticky situation like with the trolls he could not help the situation but perhaps made it worse. I thought it was really funny how he constantly proclaimed his title as king of the mountain. Did he really expect the trolls to know or care about what he was talking about? I like him because he did act with a certain amount of dignity and he was proud of himself and his forefathers and their achievements. I was disappointed in the end when Thorin would not give the people of Laketown their share of the gold. Especially because they had taken in Thorin and the dwarves and helped them. I would have at least tried to make up for the losses they suffered due to Smaug and reimburse them for everything they gave to the dwarves

on their way to the mountain. I did not want him to die because it was his dream to again live in peace in the mountain and he never got to see it happen. I think he placed far too much emphasis on the arkenstone. It was only a jewel and he should put it in perspective.

Miriam's journal was quite different from Maureen's, her responses are more disjointed and contain more immediate impressions of not only the story but also of the reading of the story. Compare her first entry to that of Maureen's:

It takes forever to start. Interesting words, I like it. I paint the picture in my head about the people look in the setting. I like all fantasies especially ones about dragons or wizards.

Maureen preferred to write after each reading so her responses were written in more coherent paragraph style. Even though Maureen's responses did contain immediate impressions of anticipation, empathy and hope, her early entries were much more reflective than Miriam's were. Miriam chose to relate her thoughts while she listened to the narrative, so her responses were characterised by spontaneity. She pictured, retold, questioned, and reacted as these three excerpts reveal:

Flying spiders! Huh! The trees are alive like we are can move, listen, feel, eat flesh. Evil was around them. Eyes?! Interesting. What are they?

The dragon knew someone was there an stole some treasure. Thorin and company were afraid. Smaug knew about his missing treasure(1 out of 1,000), like someone stealing a shirt from your closet. Will he find them, I hope not. He is a fire breathing dragon. Bilbo puts on his ring. They hide in a tunnel. Smaug, what a name. Can the Dragon change colour? Did anybody die? I hope not. Only the ponies died. Dragon sword a series I've read about dragons, the dragon looks the same. The "company" can not be

fearful forever. It is not a very planned out journey is it. Bilbo should put on his ring on. Good, he did. Bilbo tried to flatter the dragon saying how great he is. I love that voice for Smaug. Did he come from England? No, Germany.

Bombur is a wimp. He has been complaining the whole trip. Someone shut him up!

What was most interesting about this pairing was how they influenced each other. Although I made it clear that the journal writing would be informal writing I also made it clear that I expected this to be a learning process in both careful reading (listening) and careful writing. Since many of the journal entries were filled with brief jotting and questions it would be pointless for me to ask the students to help each other with paragraphing and general organization, but I did ask students to help each other with more elementary mistakes like punctuation, spelling and grammar. My suggestion was that they take a pencil and circle or underline parts they found confusing or incorrect, but I also emphasized that this was not to be the primary function of the journalling process. "If you see yourself as a writing policeman, you make your partner feel like a criminal," I said. For most of the students this kind of peer editing was not threatening; in fact, most dialogue partners hardly paid attention to it. For the pairing of Maureen and Miriam though, the editing process was extremely important. Miriam, who loves to talk about literature, has had difficulty in writing about it because of problems with spelling and punctuation. In fact, Miriam's problems were even more basic than spelling and punctuation; she had problems in printing (Miriam did not use cursive script). Miriam often reversed letters so that b's and d's and g's and q's were mixed up and she used capitals and punctuation marks like seasoning: sprinkle generously. No other journal required the kind of revision for clarity that Miriam's did.

Maureen, as I have said before, was an extremely precise and successful writer. Maureen writes neat, clear and organized compositions; she had learned to figure out

what the teacher wants and just how to say it. In many ways, Maureen was the right person to deal with Miriam's often confused writing. Maureen could read Miriam's broken prose, make a few suggestions and model more polished writing. By the end of the unit there was a noticeable improvement in Miriam's writing and in her efforts to be more careful. But, even Maureen was hesitant in editing out spelling or grammatical mistakes; she left most of them alone. It was only when the journal reached my desk that it received a good going over as far as mechanics is concerned. Never-the-less this editing arrangement turned out to be a good solution, for as Miriam's journal progressed her confidence increased. Miriam wrote longer and longer entries until she was writing pages rather than just a few sentences. Miriam's interest in the story was growing in part because of Maureen's helpful and supportive comments. Miriam also realised her weakness in writing and welcomed the editing suggestions from her teacher.

Sometimes Maureen sounded much like a teacher in her correspondence with Miriam (commenting on rather than responding with or to), as the following example illustrates:

> *Twice you point out the black blood of the spiders. Does all this black and darkness point to total evil? You call the dwarves annoying once. Do you not think they treat Bilbo with enough respect? I noticed the same thing as I read. They take him for granted and they never notice that they themselves get into the bad situations only to have Bilbo rescue them again. They then thank him and bow constantly but by the next time they are in trouble they blame him and start complaining again. You also wonder about what is not said like what happened to Thorin. You read the story very well.*

Maureen's tone was a little on the patronizing side. Comments like these as well as some of the comments found in Maureen's own journal illustrate Maureen's concern with performance and evaluation. While Miriam responded in an off-the-cuff, honest and blunt way (often criticising the way I read selections or the way Tolkien wrote

certain passages), Maureen, from time to time, would slip in comments that seemed to be designed to impress the teacher rather than to genuinely react to the text or to Miriam's comments. After a while though Maureen gained a more natural voice, probably because her most important audience was not her teacher but her close friend.

Leila and Nancy

Leila and Nancy asked far more questions than any other pairing, sometimes coming back to questions three or four times. One of the reasons for so many questions might have to do with the way they strove to answer each other's questions. While the other girls wrote in paragraphs both to respond and to correspond, Leila and Nancy wrote their initial responses in point form (Wendy often did too) and wrote their correspondence all over each other's work. In some of the other journals, correspondents often seemed to ignore or forget about many of the questions of their partner but this was not the case with Leila and Nancy; both girls felt that the answer should be beside the question and a reaction to a response must be written beside the response. Arrows and numbers let the reader know exactly what the other is reacting to. In transcribing these journals I have inserted the correspondents comments beside the respondents. Here is one example from Nancy's journal (Leila's comments are indented and printed) that illustrates the conversational style that both girls adopted in journalling.

Entry #9, Feb 10,

Bombur has just woken up. He can't remember anything after the party at Bilbo's

Why that far back, does he remember
the adventure farther on?

Thorin is very mad at Bombur for sleeping for so long. Even though he has been sleeping so long he is still tired.

That's probably from the Mirk water.

They see a feast going on. They are arguing if they should go to the lights or not. (Even though they were very harshly warned not to leave the path).

By Beorn right?

Was Bombur knocked into the river on purpose so that they knew it would be okay to go there? Now that they've gone off the path they are lost.

It figures.

Again they see light.

Why? Were they knocked out?

From their first experience with the light you would think that they wouldn't go to the light again.

I don't know who is thinking.

But of course they went to the lights.

Oh? Really?

Why is everybody dreaming about dinner and food?

Because their food ran out and

they're hungry.

Does the forest do it to them? or are they just going crazy because they are so hungry? Bilbo is all by himself, now he is dreaming about food. When he woke up he was tied up by massive spider webs.

Part of the cause for so many questions in these two journals is that both girls chose to write as the story was read to them, so the questions that were written remained in the journal even though these same questions might be answered as the reading continued. Another reason for so many questions can be found in the nature of both girls, especially Nancy. Nancy was suspicious of almost all the characters, and she was especially suspicious of Gandalf; in fact she makes at least six or seven separate references (in her own and in Leila's journal) in which she questions Gandalf's motives. The following excerpt shows Nancy's belief that Gandalf is just too mysterious:

The travelling party is caught in an incredible storm. They found a cave, where goblins live, goblins seem to be extremely cruel. They make torture apparatuses. Gandalf, at first I thought he was tricky or mean because he tricked Bilbo into joining this journey. Now he seems more caring; he rescued everybody from the goblins.

How does he seem to disappear then suddenly reappear just as the dwarves get into trouble?

He's a wizard.

Maybe Gandalf is using them to get the treasure, then he will steal it and disappear.

Why do you think that? Is he that mysterious?

Nancy's journal was one of the most fascinating for me to read, for it showed much of just how Nancy makes meaning from the text. The fact that her audience is her trusted friend Leila allows Nancy to take risks in her response by suggesting interpretations of the text that she might not feel comfortable making if she were keeping a journal in which she only corresponds with the teacher.

The Trios:

The journals that the boys wrote using their three-way exchange had much in common with the PDRJs of the girls. The journals contained a wide range of response and the exchanges often helped to extend and develop the response. But, in some respects, the journals that the boys of Poplar Ridge wrote for The Hobbit were quite different from the ones the girls wrote. One of the most significant differences was that, in general, the boys wrote quite a bit less than the girls. This difference might be attributed to gender difference, or it might be attributed to something a little less controversial: the differences between the exchange processes. The boys were keeping up dialogues with two different partners, so they may have had more difficulty in reaching a comfort level in their exchanges. Trying to understand and

relate to two different partners might have been a little more difficult than understanding and relating to only one partner. In order to better explain some of these differences, I have chosen to give a more detailed description of two of the three groups.

Peter, Dennis and Dan

Peter, Dennis and Dan were close friends. They worked well together on the volleyball court and on the basketball court, but their efforts in dialogue journalling were a little less successful. Perhaps, as they suggested themselves, they were a little unsure about the assignment. Or perhaps they were a little insecure about opening up to a close friend; it is sometimes easier to respond to someone who doesn't really have any preconceptions about you.

Peter was one of those students who likes to be heard in class, but not necessarily because he always knows the answer. In class he liked to discuss literature, but he hated the work of reading it or writing about it. The aspect of writing a personal response then, must have been a daunting one for Peter, for most of his previous writing was limited to skimpily written assignments which were hastily handed in. In the first few entries of his journal Peter showed that he was having difficulty in knowing what he should write.

Entry #2
Are the swords that Gandalf and Thorin have magical?
I think that the writer is very good. He keeps me wanting to know what happens next.
I still think that Bilbo is a wimp to have tea and the dwarves are small and strong. The words that he uses are good.
Peter

Although this entry contains a few judgements, Peter failed to give enough detail and support in developing these judgements. In fact, Peter might just have been echoing sentiments expressed by other classmates or by his teacher without fully understanding what these sentiments really meant. It was really up to Dennis, Peter's correspondent, to open up an honest dialogue that would allow Peter the opportunity to clarify and support some of his judgements, but Dennis was just not the right person to do this.

Dennis, was a happy but very quiet student; he said very little and wrote even less. Dennis was also one of Peter's best friends and was, in certain respects, a Peter follower. In his correspondence with Peter, Dennis often just echoed Peter's comments or wrote what he thought were teacher-type comments as this typical exchange shows:

> *Tolkien uses rhyming and rhythm. Some of the descriptions are gory. I find that he (the writer) uses writing that is not really what it should be. He keeps his audience in suspense. He is very descriptive in his writing.*
>
> *Peter*
>
> I agree with this all the way but there is more to write than that.
>
> Dennis

Comments like these did little in getting Peter to write more, but in spite of these poor exchanges (and perhaps because of the better exchanges he had in corresponding with Dan), Peter did start to "loosen-up" in his journal as one of his later entries shows:

> *Entry 9*
>
> *What woke the dragon? Tolkien gives the dragon personality like he is smart and gets mad at people. And I did not know that the dragon can talk! I see that dumb dragon as a retarded French dude that should be shot. If the dragon would know his name, how would that be dangerous? The tunnel that they had been in is a dark tunnel that smells like sulphur.*

The hoard of treasure I see is far more precious than all the gold in Fort Knox. The dragon is going to go to Lake Town and then burn and kill everyone there and it's cool.

Peter

Although Peter continued his posturing in order to impress Dennis with his tough talk ("retarded french dude") and kept his focus on the gorier side of the story-line (the destruction of Lake Town), his response is his own. Peter's journal wasn't one of the best of the class, in fact it was one of the poorest; but Peter did work through a few ideas in this unit and even began to read one of Tolkien's much more difficult works, The Lord of The Rings.

In his own journal, Dennis often wrote even less than he wrote to Peter in Peter's journal. Many of Dennis's entries consisted of just a line or two of retold plot details:

Entry 3

When the goblins saw the swords that Gandalf and Thorin had they were so terrified, what the trolls did must have been so terrible and frightening because when the goblins saw the swords they went crazy.

Dennis

Dan (Dennis's correspondent) tried to get Dennis writing a little more, but it seemed that he eventually gave up, for Dennis had left him little to build upon as this exchange shows:

Entry 8:

I wonder how they fit Bombur into the barrel.

Dennis

I wonder too.

Dan

Dennis's was the weakest of all the journals, for not only was it the briefest, it also had very few instances of comparison, analysis, insight or evaluation. Dennis realised this himself when he wrote: "I didn't really enjoy journalling much because I often found myself stuck, not knowing what to write... ." Dennis, like a few others in class, expressed the need for a more concrete assignment, so he could answer questions. His request was a valid one; many students, like Peter and Dennis, are just not comfortable with open-ended assignments.

For Dan, it was a different story altogether. Dan gave journalling a real workman-like effort, writing paragraphs while Peter and Dennis were writing only sentences. Dan, like Peter and Dennis, spent much of his time relating immediate impressions (picturing, retelling, anticipating, questioning, empathising and simply reacting), but unlike Peter and Dennis's responses, Dan's were rich in support and detail. When he retold a section of the novel, Dan often followed this retelling with a reaction or a response as he does in this excerpt from his fourth entry:

> *The goblins knew the area very well and they really wanted to get those nasty dwarves. They ran quickly after them. It seemed kind of like a TV show. The bad guys chasing the good guys.*
> *Then when Bilbo was being carried by Dori the goblins got hold of Dori and Bilbo fell off and bumped his head. He finds a ring, meets Gollum, escaped from the Goblins and finds his way back to the dwarves. They all were angry that they had taken Bilbo along. They were just about to look for him when he took off his ring and they were all very surprised. The look on their faces must have been quite humorous. I found it quite interesting that Bilbo did not show them the ring. He must have been proud of it.*

At one point in the process Peter complained to the rest of the class that his partner was writing too much; poor Peter often had to read three or four paragraphs of work and then think of something to write back. So, just like his own early responses, Peter's early correspondence with Dan was limited to vague comments:

That is very good you see them and tell how you see them and compare with things you seen before. Good Danny.

After a bit of a scolding from his teacher and after some encouragement from Dan, Peter started to write more natural and more appropriate responses as he does in this response to one of Dan's shorter entries:

Bilbo gains a lot of courage when he kills the spider all by himself. Tolkien doesn't use much description of the place where the dwarves were being held. I pictured it as a ring of trees with a big web hanging between the trees. Bilbo is pretty smart in the way he lured the spiders away. When the spiders came back Bilbo seemed to take a leadership role. He leads the battle and is responsible for letting the dwarves escape. The dwarves had a higher respect for Bilbo when they escaped. I haven't heard much about Thorin lately. Where is he? Tolkien finally states that Thorin is gone! He had been captured by the wood elves when they were attacked by the spiders. I pictured the elf king as a big fat elf with a long pointy hat, and curled shoes. The dungeon which Thoron is kept in is a dark deep cave with a solid oak door with a barred window in the top.

Dan

In the killing the spider I think that Bilbo was more scared than courageous. I think that Tolkien does describe very well where the dwarves were. Don't you think that it would have been funny to see them dangling there? Bilbo had no other choice to take a leadership role in the escape because he was the only free one the others were tied up. I see the elf king as fatter and more drunk than you see him. He reminds me of our neighbour down the road. I see the dungeon that Thorin is in as a place that is very low in the ground and is full of water and dark and stinky.

Peter

As the book unfolded Dan continued to relate immediate impressions, especially anticipation-type questions, but he also started to float out his own predictions and theories on how the novel would turn out. The kind of effort that Dan put in on this unit was quite a bit above what he put in on other units throughout the year.

Gerry, Douglas and Ian

Gerry, Douglas and Ian were the three boys who found themselves together because there really was no room in the other groups. Although they had been in the same class with each other since kindergarten, they had never been the best of friends. These three boys each had different interests, capabilities and learning styles and these differences were reflected in their respective journals.

Gerry's success in school rested upon his achievements in math and science; Gerry was a whiz-kid at figuring out problems. In Math and Science Gerry seldom had to work hard, but in language arts it was a different story. Gerry had trouble seeing past the most immediate or concrete level in literature. He had difficulty in suggesting that a story or a novel might have some kind of underlying message or theme, and when he made a stab at some kind of interpretation, it often came off as farfetched or even ludicrous. Like Peter and Dennis, Gerry wrote very little until he was forced to (in the last writing assignment on The Hobbit I assigned a minimum word count requirement). One thing that Gerry did like to do though was to draw, so if a picture represents a thousand words then Gerry's journal surely must have been one of the longest. Gerry drew pictures of the scenery, of the House of Elrond, of Bilbo and the dwarves and of Gandalf and Thorin's magical swords.

But, as I have already said, apart from his drawings, Gerry's journal was less than impressive and part of the reason for this lacklustre effort can be traced to the well-meaning but inappropriate correspondence he received from his correspondent Douglas. Douglas's replies to Gerry's responses were much like Dennis's were to Peter; Douglas felt that in order to be a good correspondent he should write teacher-like comments, but these comments were hardly helpful.

Entry 5

I think that they will all make it to Laketown without incident and then go quickly to the mountain to slay the dragon and recover the gold but afterwards the humans will bug the dwarves for gold because the song said the rivers would flow with gold and I don't think the dwarves would give away any gold.

Gerry

This is right but you should write a little more than this.

Douglas

Entry 6

The story at this point seems to be getting kind of dreary with no trees, hardly any grass, dark crags of rock and crows. It seems like the long descriptive sentences are ending and short stubby sentences describing the surrounding are bleak and dark, black and grey. You almost might think the grass on the "doorstep" is grey.
I think that the thrush is actually Gandalf.

Gerry

Talk some more about the writer of this story J.R. Tolkien. I think he is an interesting type of guy.

Douglas

In these last two instances Gerry does make a couple of interesting comments which might lead to a thoughtful discussion, but Douglas shuts the discussion down. Awkward exchanges like these showed me that the students needed more practice in reading and responding to other people's work.

Douglas wrote a lot more in his own journal (much more than Peter, Gerry or Dennis), but almost all of his writings were attempts to picture. He described what he thought various characters looked like and made a few predictions about the outcome of the adventure. Douglas received little or no help from his correspondent Ian. For the most part Ian only wrote a few comments in Douglas's journal, and Ian's comments were usually ones in which he "corrected" Douglas's comments or predictions.

Ian's journal, in comparison with his two partners, was quite extensive; Ian's journal included a significant number of predictions, and numerous comparisons to other fantasy writers (most often to Terry Brooks). Although Ian did not get a whole lot of feedback from his partner he did write an impressive PDRJ.

Ellis, Toby, Gordon.

The third group of boys, Ellis, Toby, and Gordon did a better job of corresponding than the first two. One of the reasons for this was that both Toby and Gordon proved to be interested readers who wrote extensive entries. The pressure of two very serious correspondents forced Ellis into writing more than he was used to. With respect to opening up a free and extensive correspondence, the group of Ellis, Toby and Gordon had more in common with the pairings of girls than it did with the other two groups of boys.

An Overview

The journals provided interesting reading; they allowed me a short glimpse into how each of these students responded to the fantasy novel The Hobbit. The journals gave evidence of the wide range in type and depth of response found in a grade nine classroom, and provided the basis for the model of the elements of response that I spelled out earlier in this work. The journals also showed that differences in ability and in learning styles could be accommodated, especially in journals such as the ones shared between Miriam and Maureen or between Toby and Ellis.

In the beginning of the unit, four or five of the students were still very much aware that their teacher was going to read and evaluate their journals, and therefore many of their comments were directed more towards me than to each other. But, soon these same students lost their need to impress the teacher and started to talk to their more immediate audience, their dialogue correspondent. The comfort of writing to an old friend allowed many of the students (at least ten) to write easily and freely; it allowed them to conjecture about aspects of characterization and plot that they

might not discuss with their teacher. Seven or eight of the students wrote quite extensive journals, and for at least five of them (Toby, Dan, Nancy, Leila, and Wendy) the work they put into the "hobbit" unit was significantly more than they had put into any other unit of the year. Even now, as the students are entering grade twelve, most of the fifteen students refer to The Hobbit as the most interesting and memorable unit they have studied with me in junior and senior high English. (I have taught them English 9, 20, and 30).

But, for a teacher trying to decide if peer dialogue response journals were an effective teaching methodology, the unit was somewhat disappointing. Even though the journals were frequently passed and read, only the six girls and two of the nine boys made a significant effort to try and open any real dialogue about the readings. The other seven boys were either unsure about what to say or simply chose to correspond in a very limited way.

Perhaps part of the student difficulty lay in the set-up and organization of the unit. Fearing that I might impose too much of my own expectations on the students, I gave them instead too little direction. Often the students (especially Peter, Gerry, Dennis and Wendy) complained that they did not know what to write about. Gerry, Peter, Dennis, and Douglas seldom wrote over a paragraph until they had to in the final assignment and at that point they welcomed the more stringent requirements and the clear questions. These boys were just not comfortable with the freedom of simply responding.

Another problem in the set-up were the exchanges themselves. Often there simply wasn't time for an exchange. In response to student pleas I read until a significant break in the action which sometimes left insufficient time for writing and sharing responses. When exchanges were made, especially within the groups of three boys, it was a messy process: some students wanted to exchange right away (Dennis and Peter) while others (Dan, Ian, and Toby) wanted to finish their thoughts without being pestered by their partners. Students were not forced to take the journals home even if they wrote little or nothing for I believed that the students' choice to do homework or not would prove how well or how poorly the unit was working; all it

really proved was that some students will avoid homework no matter what the assignment may be.

Although certain issues came up time and time again, very few students continued to discuss a topic or issue for several consecutive passes of the journal. Only Nancy and Leila, in their scribble-in-the-margin, draw-arrows-everywhere fashion of correspondence, made a significant effort to resolve some of their concerns. Usually a journal was passed to the correspondent only once after each reading and very seldom did the correspondent's entry receive any kind of feedback from the initial respondent.

Some journals, as I have already pointed out in the discussion of particular groupings, hardly contained any attempts at a connected dialogue. These journals were filled with what I call "isolated entries". The correspondent wrote entries that failed to link-up with anything their partner had written. Instead, these "dis-connected correspondents" simply wrote more of their own impressions or asked teacher type questions that had nothing to do with what their partner had been writing about.

Although the "hobbit" journals revealed many important aspects of response journalling and the role of an audience in this journalling, they had failed to give an accurate reflection of whether or not Peer DIALOGUE Response Journals would be useful in the teaching of English. It was time for another research project.

Willowdale 1992 (March 9-April 24)

As I have already said, the PDRJ unit on The Hobbit was originally intended as only a preliminary study for a journalling unit that was to be run by Beverly Hutchens in one of her grade nine classrooms in the Edmonton area. As I continued my study, I began to realize that the class from Poplar Ridge, with its limited numbers, would provide a much more focused discussion of what happened. The fact that this class from Poplar Ridge would eventually be involved in two different units

would also give me more to compare and assess. But this choice to focus most heavily upon the two Poplar Ridge studies does not mean that the study in Willowdale was insignificant or unimportant. On the contrary, the study in Willowdale involved extensive planning (between Beverly and me), intensive journalling (by the students) and quite a significant amount of data collection which included journals by the students, the teacher and the researcher, videotapes of the students, self-evaluation work by the students, and taped interviews with selected students.

What follows is an overview of the Willowdale study. In the interests of economy and unity I have decided not to refer to particular students in this section. Introducing thirty new students, each having their own particular modes of response would only serve to confuse the reader. Instead, the focus of this section will be on how the Willowdale unit helped in refining and reshaping the journal process and its relation to the last Poplar Ridge unit.

In the Willowdale study the students were to go through a more structured dialogue process in which they were to discuss a number of short stories, poems and even videos, all having to do with the rather loose theme of "change". I felt it was necessary to deal with shorter pieces of literature in order to facilitate more interpretive and summative responses. For the purposes of this study I wanted to the students to read and respond to a number of pieces of literature in order to see if they would go through a type of response process. Beverly and I discussed some of the material that we thought might stimulate a good range of discussion in the journals and then she chose over ten separate works to use in the classroom.

The class that Beverly taught was significantly larger than the one I used in my previous study; there were a total of thirty-one students. By this point in her school year Beverly knew her class as well as a teacher can in a relatively large junior high school and she used this knowledge in grouping students into peer-dialogue triads:

> I looked at putting students together that would be able to relate and connect. It wasn't so important that they had common interests, but

> that they would be able to connect. I tried to find challenges for the "bright" or "academic" students, respect for students of other cultures or limited ability, not to put three non-verbal types together, or three very verbal types together, or three very judgemental types together (of each other). I didn't pay much attention to sex -- girls and boys were mixed and I didn't worry too much about that aspect. I also looked at putting students together that may not have had much opportunity to talk to each other in the past.

While my students all knew each other quite well, Beverly's students were not as familiar with each other and so the journalling unit would provide an opportunity to open up new friendships.

Beverly's groupings worked out fairly well. With the exception of one student who proved to be a little antagonistic and had to be removed for the study and another who seemed to be gone quite a bit of the time, most students worked well within their groups. There were some interesting instances of group dynamics though. Some groups seemed to be defined by the viewpoints of only one of the three students. Students who were well respected by their peers could effectively stifle any new dialogue by writing responses that were so well thought-out that they intimidated other students who would not risk putting forth their own views. Another student did little to mask her dislike for a boy in her group. Even though this girl devalued and even ignored his entries, the boy continued to write meaningful and effective responses and by the end of the unit he received grudging respect and an apology from her in his journal.

As with the groupings on The Hobbit there were some groups that worked tremendously well and others which wrote little and complained a lot. In the few groups which wrote very little there seemed to be some common denominators. Usually the group was influenced by one or two students. One rather bright but "cool" student thought that the activity was "dumb" and it was quite noticeable in his group's journals how he influenced the others to think the way he did. Often

students in the two or three groups which wrote very little, wrote blunt judgements of the texts ("this is a stupid story"), criticisms that more often than not showed a lack of comprehension. Beverly discussed this problem with her class telling them to come up with specifics; if they felt that a story was "stupid" they should be able to relate specific examples of stupidity. After Beverly's little talk with her students both she and I noticed a difference in the way the students journalled.

In order to facilitate a greater dialogue between the students, I decided that each journal should have no less than five entries on each story or poem. For the first five or six selections the exchange process looked like this:

A's Journal

1. Initial response (written to B)
2. B's reply
3. Return response (written to C)
4. C's reply
5. Summative response (by A)

In essence, since there were in fact three voices in every journal, this exchange process created peer trialogue journals rather than peer dialogue journals. We believed that such an exchange might allow each student to consider two different viewpoints.

For the students the exchange process proved to be quite confusing. The students weren't sure which partner to pass their journal to, or even what to write when they wrote their return response. There was a lot of overlap in the journals because some students chose to write the same questions, concerns and observation in their return response as they did in their initial response. Apparently they wanted to compare their partners' replies. Some students saved themselves the extra work of copying out the first response; they simply wrote: "Read my first response to B". These "trialogue" journals did not promote all that many "extended" responses for I guess it is hard to follow a particular pathway of thought if you have to walk with two partners who might choose to go in opposing directions.

At this point Beverly and I decided that two is company but three is a crowd, and so we decided to use a format like the one the groups of three used in the unit on The Hobbit. The students would be involved in keeping two different dialogues, one as respondent and the other as correspondent. The exchange process looked something like this:

A's journal

1. Initial response (written to B)
2. B's reply
3. Further response (written to B)
4. B's second reply
5. Summative response

(B would keep a journal with C and C would keep a journal with A)

This new process allowed the students to take their correspondence to one more level by seeking further clarification from each other before writing a summative response. The new process also allowed each pairing to establish a comfortable rapport based on regular and consistent feedback. And the new process lessened the chance of one student becoming a dominating influence.

One aspect that Beverly and I hadn't counted on though, was that of dialogue happening outside of the journals. In my unit on The Hobbit the students were seated apart from each other in separate desks. When they wrote in their journals, the Poplar Ridge students did very little talking. In the Willowdale classroom there was much more talk. Students were seated very closely in their groups of three and so they sometimes short-circuited their own jottings by musing and questioning aloud. The discussions resulting from these little talks were not documented in the journals and as such many instances of student connecting with student were lost. The Willowdale classroom was also much more tightly packed with students than the Poplar Ridge classroom was. This lack of space meant that groups of students discussing amongst themselves were overheard by neighbouring groups. The result of these eavesdropping were both positive and negative. Sometimes groups learned a great deal from each other and other times they just interfered with the process by

making groups and individuals self-conscious about their interpretations and or questions.

The Willowdale journals revealed more than just a range of student insight and opinion, they also revealed some of the problems that students have in comprehension. For example there were some very strange entries in response to The Sniper, entries in which the students struggled to reconcile the story as a whole and its impact without having the necessary knowledge to do so. For quite a number of students the word "sniper" (at least ten of thirty respondents did not know what one was), the Irish setting and the military detail and subtle character description led to very confusing entries. One girl wasn't sure just what a "snipper" (sic) was, or even if it were human or not. The dialogue journals allowed the students to deal with each others' questions in a non-threatening forum. The student journals also reminded Beverly and me of the differences between the teacher's reading ability and background knowledge and the ability and background knowledge of the students. After reading some of the journal entries on "The Sniper" Beverly decided to give a mini-lecture explaining just what a sniper is and what he does and giving some background information on the Irish Civil War.

While observing the Willowdale unit, I came to realize that the PDRJ units could easily be improved. The system for exchanging journals needed to be reworked; having three correspondents all writing in the same journal brought about too much repetition and confusion. Some opportunity to verbally discuss the stories in small group settings needed to be incorporated into the unit; too many Willowdale students were frustrated by the tedious process writing and responding to writing. They wanted the free flow of ideas that can only be shared while talking. Some opportunity for the teacher to find out about misreadings and misunderstandings also needed to be built into the process; too many Willowdale students were frustrated because the stories or poems presented difficult language or involved settings that the students could not relate to. These three realisations heavily influenced the construction of the second Poplar Ridge unit.

Poplar Ridge '92, Two Stories and a Poem (April 6- April 24)

Building on what I learned from the other two journal experiences I decided to run one more very focussed PDRJ unit in my own classroom. Using the same class as I did in The Hobbit journals, I selected two short stories and one poem and ran a peer dialogue response journal unit of eight 40 minute periods. The stories used were: "The Weapon" by Frederick Brown and "On The Sidewalk Bleeding" by Evan Hunter. The poem used was Ted Hughes' "The Stag". These selections were made partly out of personal preference and partly because I thought that students might be able to come at these selections on a number of different levels. It was hoped that these selections would allow the students to do more analyzing, interpreting and evaluating.

In order to focus on the dialogue element, I stressed that, like the students in Willowdale, the Poplar Ridge students would have to write about each selection no less than five times and in order to eliminate confusion during exchanges I wrote up a hand-out outlining the process that I expected each group to follow. In an effort to lend clarity to the handout, I stayed away from confusing pronouns and instead chose to illustrate the exchange process as it would be experienced by two fictional students, Bob and Brenda.

Our Journal Process

1. INITIAL READING (Brenda)

Read or listen closely. You might need to write continuously as you read, or to jot down only a few prompts for your later responses.

2. INITIAL RESPONSE (Brenda)

Start each response with a heading and a date. Write down your immediate impressions and if you find a lot to write about... just keep writing. If you would like to respond in a different way than you usually do consult handouts dj 2,3, or 4. You may also choose to respond to the selection with a short story or poem of your own.

If you are still stuck for something to write about... consult the handout on the selection and choose a particular question to answer or topic to write about. Think about the topic or question you selected and jot down a few ideas on scrap paper before you start. End your response by signing your name.

3. FIRST REPLY (Bob)

Carefully read and re-read your partner's response and perhaps the selection before starting your reply. Compare her response to the story with yours. If there are major problems in logic, grammar or spelling in the response you are reading, use a pencil to suggest changes in the margin beside it.

Please don't get carried away with editing though; these are only journal entries and are not final drafts.

Before you write your reply take note of any questions your partner might have asked in her journal and note or highlight some aspects of her work that you would like to speak about. If your partner has started a poem or story, discuss her choices, ask questions or make suggestions, or write your own poem or story in reply.

Please try not to be too critical in your reply, and instead try to help your partner to extend or build on his response

Don't forget to address your reply (Dear Brenda?), date it and sign it at the bottom.

4. FURTHER RESPONSE (Brenda)

Read your partner's reply and if he makes some concrete references to the literature... re-read those parts of the selection he refers to. If you find that your correspondent has given you little to write about, you may just continue where you left off on your first entry, you may choose to bring in information from your other dialogue partner, or you may start on a whole new train of thought.

5. SECOND REPLY (Bob)

Much the same as the first reply.

6. GROUP DISCUSSION (Brenda, Bob and Sam)

Here's your chance to openly and animatedly discuss your impressions of the selection with the other two members of the group. If, as a group, you are stuck for things to talk about, you can just read aloud the parts of each others journals that you found to be especially entertaining, insightful or puzzling. Throughout your discussion try to isolate 1 or 2 questions or topics you would like to bring before the whole class.

7. CLASS DISCUSSION

This is your last chance to compare and contrast your response to the story to the response of your classmates. This discussion could end up clarifying a few things for you, or it might just give you more questions; at any rate there will be much to talk and write about.

8. FINAL RESPONSE (Brenda)

This response can be a continuation of your other responses, a summary of your conclusions, or an overview of what you experienced during the process.

The hand-out built upon routines that the class and I had already established in the "hobbit" unit, and added some new elements as well. I hoped that the students would use this guide in order to become better correspondents; that they might begin to have some sustained and meaningful dialogue in their journals. In response to what I saw happening in my own classroom and in Beverly Hutchen's classroom, I also saw the need for some sort of group and class discussion and this I built into the exchange process. Along with the hand-out on the exchange process I made a chart of the exchange process for each individual group and I pinned it to one of my bulletin boards. In Beverly's classroom there was some confusion about the exchange process, so I thought I had better spell it out and lead the class through it.

In addition to the hand-out outlining the exchange process, I gave out three more hand-outs intended to help students who had difficulty in getting their journal entries started. I also gave out selection-specific hand-outs on each story; these students were going to have no excuse for not writing.

The peer groupings for this unit were chosen by me, with an eye to getting at

least one strong journalist in each group. Some students realised that I had an agenda for grouping and they protested a little, but I admitted that I had stacked the groups and explained to them that this was all part of the study and then they went along with the groupings with little or no fuss at all. The groupings were as follows:

Nancy>Toby, Toby>Douglas, and Douglas>Nancy;
Leila>Peter, Peter>Gerry, and Gerry>Leila;
Wendy>Dennis, Dennis>Ian, and Ian>Wendy;
Maureen>Dan, Dan>Miriam, and Miriam>Maureen; and
Gordon>Ardyth, Ardyth>Ellis, and Ellis>Gordon.

I also took the time to explain why I wanted to do this unit and went over the best and the weakest aspects of their "hobbit" unit. Then I went over the tasks of the correspondent: to build on the partner's response, to select details in it to discuss and to get their partner to elaborate and expand. This little talk, along with the preparations made for this unit, left a pretty strong impression on the students for they took the unit very seriously. While students were responding or corresponding there was very little noise in the classroom. Once again, in an effort to avoid "flogging the material to death" as my students have so aptly put it, I have decided to focus only on the PDRJs of the first three groups of students.

Nancy, Toby and Douglas

Since Nancy and Toby both wrote extensive and imaginative journals in response to The Hobbit, I wanted to see what kinds of insight they could come up with together. These two did not disappoint me; both students wrote lengthy entries which displayed a wide range of comparative, analytic, interpretive and summative response. In response to "The Weapon", Frederick Brown's short story about a scientist involved in making an ultimate weapon and the strange visitor he received at his home, Nancy and Toby showed how two students can effectively work together in coming to a richer understanding of the story:

The Weapon

First, April 7,

When Graham first opens the door he thinks to himself that Niemand is "obviously harmless". His (Graham) thoughts drastically change at the end when he finds out that Niemand gave his son a gun. He also calls him a madman. I think that Niemand on some level is "strange" because he comes into Graham's house and he hints at him that the weapon he is working on is inhuman and immoral. Then he turns around and Niemand gives Graham's son a loaded revolver. Now that, in my opinion, is inhuman and immoral.

It seems that Dr. Graham has two conflicting sides ideas. First of all, Dr. Graham is working on the Ultimate weapon which, as Niemand puts it, could "end the human race's chance for survival". So this makes Graham in a sense seem fierce. Then secondly Graham has compassion. He obviously loves his "mentally arrested" son and it is said that Graham disliked being rude. Also the fact that he liked to sit alone and think made him seem peaceful. (As opposed to him seemingly being fierce, by working on the ultimate weapon) When Niemand said "I hope what you're going to read him will always be true". This is what I think he meant.

Chicken Little thought the sky was falling. With the ultimate weapon that also could cause the "sky to fall". But Chicken Little was wrong. They sky didn't fall. I think that Niemand hoped that the weapon would never have the chance to operate. (make the sky fall)

I think that this was Niemand's way of telling Graham that he totally disapproved of Graham's work on the weapon.

Nancy

In this entry Nancy shows that she pays a lot of attention to both the events and to the characters, and from her observations on these two elements Nancy fashions a

pretty good analysis of the two different roles of Dr. Graham (father and scientist) and of the motives of Mr. Niemand. Nancy's entry was very perceptive and it sparks a meaningful dialogue with Toby.

Nancy, April 8,

I don't think that Graham was the only one who was fooled by Niemand. I think that everyone who read this story thought that Niemand was just what Graham called him, a madman. I like the way you noticed Graham's personalities. I think that there is more to Graham than the story presents him as. You said that Niemand didn't want the weapon to go through. I think that's why he gave Harry a gun. Niemand knew that Harry's death would have a definite impact on Graham. Graham would be very hurt if he lost his only son. His grief would take him away from his work, and he might even quit working all together.

Toby

Toby, April 9,

Do you think the author wanted the reader to think this? I think he did because the ending then would shock you more. It came very unexpectedly. What kind of weapon is Graham working on? From the picture of the atom on the first page you might think that the weapon is an atomic one or a nuclear warhead.

I also wonder if Graham is conscientiously affected by working on the weapon. Did he feel guilty for working on a weapon that could end "humanity"?

I thought the same thing. But I'm finding out that a lot of people are thinking that the gun was to kill Graham. Why would a person with a mental age of four want to kill his loving father? I also think that it was possible that Niemand wanted Harry dead.

Nancy

April 9,

I thought that the ending came very unexpectedly myself. I kind of had a feeling that Niemand wasn't as innocent as the story presented him, but I didn't think that he would go to the extreme.

I don't think the type of weapon matters in the story. I think that the whole idea of the weapon is to show Graham different personalities. There is a definite clash between Graham's work and the life he had with his mentally arrested son.

One way or another. Niemand wanted the weapon project to fall through. If Harry just killed himself Graham would be so depressed that he might quit working on the gun or he might even kill himself. If Harry took out himself and Graham, the weapon project would fall through because there would be no one to work on the project. This way, Niemand had a perfect plan.

Toby

In these entries Nancy and Toby show that they can "connect" and carry on a meaningful discussion about the story. Specific questions and remarks are commented on and through their inquiry Nancy and Toby come closer to resolving one central question for themselves: "Why did Niemand give the revolver to the child?" In her summative entry (after group and class discussions) Nancy stated:

Toby, April 10,

I think the unexpected ending is appropriate. So therefore I think the story is complete and ends the right way. His ending really drove in the point about Niemand's character. I think I would have hated to be Graham when he found his son with the gun!! Maybe he wasn't meant to kill anyone.

Nancy

So instead of sitting back and passively waiting for their teacher to suggest his interpretation of the story, Nancy and Toby, with the help of a few of their class mates, have quite actively made a search for meaning. Their dialogue shows some of the promise that I found in using dialogue journals: the journals can provide an effective forum for discussion and debate leading to a more personal identification with and internalisation of the story.

The third person in this group of three was Douglas. Douglas was put into this group for several reasons: his "hobbit" journal had little to say and was not very imaginative and his replies in Gerry's journal failed to have the kind of connectedness which might spark further discussion. Another important consideration is that some of the other students treated Douglas rather unkindly; he needed to be with a couple of students who would read and consider his writings.

But, even after being paired with a couple of very motivated journalists, Douglas showed only a little improvement. He was stuck for things to write and often just tried to answer some of the open-ended questions on the response handouts.

The Weapon

Nancy, April 7:

This story made me feel a little mad because the father kept giving his son names that were not nice, but they may have been true, but he does not have to think or say them in front of his son.

This story is really about a man that may be someone wanted by police or that has been already with the police but has escaped and is giving this boy a gun to so that he could become bad like he was and maybe even kill his father.

The construction of this story was not that bad.

There was this man we did not know who came knocking at my door he came for a while and left by giving my son a gun.

Douglas

In his initial entry on "The Weapon" Douglas shows some of the comprehension problems that make it difficult for him to appreciate the story the way that Nancy and Toby do. Douglas was angered by the way that Graham treated his child; he believed that Graham's thoughts describing his son as "mentally arrested" were meant as some sort of put-down. Immediately Douglas has a much more negative view of Graham's role as a father than his two correspondents do. Adding to Douglas's confusion were some of his own text-free associations. Douglas assumes that since Mr. Niemand carried a gun and gave that gun to Harry, that Mr. Niemand could only be some kind of evil character with a history of crime. Douglas's last two sentences show his need to try and write what he thinks the teacher would like to read. His effort to discuss the construction of the story was in response to one of the writing starts, and it is a good example of how teacher terminology and teacher questions often miss the mark with students like Douglas. Douglas is simply not ready for a question on the construction of the story; he needs help with the more immediate problem of comprehending and understanding many of the minor details before he can make any sort of literary evaluation. Nancy tries to give him some of this help:

To Douglas, April 8:

Your impression of the father was totally different from what I thought. It says halfway through the second paragraph that the father's thoughts were loving thoughts. To me it seemed as if the father cared for his son, and most importantly I don't think he was ashamed of his son in any least way.

In your second response paragraph you said that Graham was "bad". Tell me more about that!! Where did you pick up that idea? You said that Niemand gave Harry the gun to kill his father. Maybe in a way Niemand wanted to have Dr.Graham killed for his working on the weapon. But why would Niemand give the gun to the boy? I think it would be more likely that Niemand wanted him to stop working. At least that's what I sort of think!!!

Nancy

While Nancy could have raised a number of different issues, she chose to focus on only two: the real nature of Dr. Graham and the reason for Niemand leaving a gun with the mentally arrested son. Nancy has done a good job; these two issues really are at the heart of Douglas's confusion and through comparisons to her own response and through references to the text, she challenges Douglas to support his view of both Graham and Niemand. Unfortunately, Douglas fails to reply to Nancy's challenge and instead chooses to write an entry that has little to do with Nancy's attempt at dialogue.

To Nancy, April 9:

The character I most admire is Harry because he is kind to his father and because in a way he is mentally handicapped. Although in the beginning I thought his father was nice to Harry and then mean (1) to his son but near the end he changes. (2) Harry was okay the whole way through and when he got the gun from Niemand he should have just given it back and not accept it. But instead he just kept the gun and then his father came in. (3)

If I were Harry at this point I would have gave the gun back to him but if he gave it to me again I would ask him to stay where he was and call the police to come and arrest him. (4) Because he is giving a loaded revolver to shoot myself and or my father.

If I could talk to the doctor I would tell him to take the gun where the sun don't shine and then pull the trigger.

Douglas

(Numbers in brackets are points that Nancy had singled out for response)

Once again Nancy attempts to pull Douglas into a dialogue:

To Douglas, April 9.

1. Tell me why you thought Graham was mean to his son! (I find that

statement interesting)

2. Where do you think he changes from good to bad to good again? When you said that Graham changes.

3. Harry had a mental age of four that meant that he was at the same "thinking" level as a four year old. I think that Harry would have been confused, and not really know what the weapon was. Also in the story it said that Harry felt safe enough to climb onto Niemand's lap. Niemand also said that he liked Harry. So why wouldn't Harry accept a "gift" from Niemand, if Niemand seemed like a nice person?

4. Do you think that Niemand wanted Harry to shoot himself or the father? Why? What did you think of Niemand? Did he seem nice at first, or strange right off the bat?

Nancy

Nancy has again identified some of the principal misreadings and illogical associations that Douglas has made. Douglas's entry must be quite confusing for her (as it is for us), for nowhere in the text is the slightest hint that Dr. Graham has anything but love for his child. Douglas is also very confused when he evaluates Harry's actions on the basis of what he (Douglas) might do in the same situation. All four of Nancy's points might facilitate a good discussion and a subsequent leap in comprehension for Douglas, but instead he chose, once again, to ignore her comments.

Douglas did pick up a few details after his group discussion and after the class discussion, but his level of enjoyment was seriously hampered by his struggles with minor and major details of comprehension:

Summative Response, April 10:

I really dislike the idea of Graham making the weapon because if it were our times people would be getting killed all the time and we would not want that to happen because this world became such a horrible place to live in. The part of Chicken Little finally came into me after the group

discussion and the class discussion. I do think that Dr. Niemand's plan will fail as he exactly had thought of unless Graham and Harry get rid of the gun.

I have changed my mind by saying this story sucks but I guess it is okay, but I found that this story goes a little too fast and does not have enough written about it and has no good end. That is the only problem of the story. I feel that Frederick Brown should have made this story in a totally different way instead of with just Dr. Niemand giving the son a loaded revolver, he should have added more about how it turned out. (if his plan worked) And if Graham changed his life totally by stopping the project of the weapon. The story does not end.

Douglas's profession that he found the story to be "okay" is not all that convincing, for immediately after he voices some of his discontent. Contrary to his first entry Douglas is not at all pleased with "the construction of the story." Douglas felt, like several other students in the class, that the story remains incomplete; he needs a tie-it-up television drama-type ending. Douglas fails to realize that Niemand's plan may have succeeded even if their weren't any dead bodies lying on the floor as the story concluded.

The response exchange between Douglas and Nancy did improve a little though when the two wrote about "The Stag" and about "On The Sidewalk Bleeding." In his journal Douglas began to write one-sentence answers to Nancy's very direct questions. The resultant exchanges between these two weren't among the most imaginative and insightful, but they did show some connectedness and an attempt at sustained inquiry.

As a correspondent Douglas showed little or no growth from the 'hobbit" unit to this unit. Douglas's replies in Gerry's "hobbit" journal were little more than vague teacher-type questions that had little or no connection to what Gerry had written. Douglas wrote the same kind of comments to Toby. In fact, it almost seemed as if Douglas didn't even read Toby's entries for many of the very issues that came up in

Douglas's journal with Nancy also came up in Toby's journal with Douglas. What follows is the complete text of the journal exchange between Toby and Douglas on "The Weapon":

The Weapon

April 7,

The beginning of the story is actually quite interesting. It is the type of beginning that pulls you into the story. It uses a lot of words that give you a real picture of the atmosphere in your mind.

Some different characters have already come in at the beginning of the story. Graham is quite a normal person, but he has a rare job that not many people have, key scientist of an important project. This job makes him different from everyone else. His son is altogether totally different from everyone else. He is mentally arrested. I think that his disability is going to make quite an interesting character. Niemand is also different from everyone else. His name is different. The description of himself reminds me of Mr. Kuntz, a small, harmless man.

Graham seems like a very busy man. He seems like he would only care about his work, but I'm sure that's not true if his son is mentally arrested. I'm actually surprised that Graham held onto his son. Dr. Graham obviously gets his share of reporters and other people like them. I can see this when I see his attitude towards Niemand.

I think that Harry is a very interesting character. I don't know why I think so, maybe because I think that all people with disabilities are special.

I wonder what the secret weapon is? Maybe it's not important. Maybe the whole point at the story is to show that Graham spends too much time on his work.

I don't know if I trust Dr. Niemand. I've got a feeling that he's not such a simple man like the book describes him. I kind of got the feeling that Niemand was up to something when he asked for a drink, and then had two.

I was actually surprised at the ending of the story. I know that Niemand was suspicious, but I didn't think that he would give Harry a gun.

I wonder why Niemand wanted Harry to kill himself. Maybe he felt sorry for Harry. Maybe Niemand was a madman. I liked this story because it was mysterious. It was almost a thriller, and it had a lot of neat characters. A lot of different characters, like Harry.

The end of the story was kind of different I thought. I didn't think that this story was very predictable at all. I thought the ending was very surprising. I thought that the ending was the best part of the story.

Toby

April 8

This response is a very good one but I thought that when the title was "The Weapon" and that Dr. Niemand came in I could see that he was up to no good and would either kill Harry's father or Harry, I didn't know he would give the loaded gun to Harry so that he would kill himself and his father. You should also talk about what this story was all about. I also found this story kind of boring in a sense but then I changed my mind. I would talk about why the author picks such big interesting words.

Douglas

April 9.

Fredrick Brown doesn't really use that many big, interesting words. I thought that the story was actually very basic. But that doesn't mean that I didn't like it. I had a feeling that Niemand was up to no good too. I thought that he was very suspicious when he asked for a drink and had two. I didn't find this story boring at all. I found it exciting.

I think that Niemand gave Harry the gun to make Graham's death like an accident. You can't hold an idiot responsible for a murder. I don't

think that Graham is such an awful guy, even though he is building a weapon that could destroy everything. I noticed this in the second paragraph when it said that Graham's mind was not on his work that night but on his mentally arrested son. In the next sentence it said that his thoughts were loving thoughts about his son. This told me that Graham wasn't really part of his work.

I like what Nancy said in her journal about Chicken Little. I never noticed it before but Chicken Little has a big connection with Harry. Niemand said that Chicken Little always worried about the sky falling on his head. He also said that this may someday come true. When Niemand said this he was referring to Harry and Graham and the weapon. Niemand knew that if Harry killed Graham and himself, the weapon project would fall through, the sky would fall on chicken little's head. Niemand's plan was perfect because it was almost untraceable. Like I said before, a mentally arrested kid can't be held for murder, especially if he's dead, and Niemand knew that.

Toby

Toby,

This is an excellent response because I actually think that it may happen, but a long time from now. I would talk about how you think each character is and what his thoughts may be and if that refers to our time.

What did Dr. Graham mean when he said "but may Chicken Little always be wrong about the sky falling down"?

Douglas

Summative Response, April 10,

I think that the main character in the story was Graham. Graham was a character that had many different personalities. I couldn't really figure him out. One minute he was a head scientist that was building a weapon that could possibly destroy all of humanity and the next minute he

was a loving and caring father to his mentally arrested son.

I thought that the weapon in this story was Harry. At least to Niemand anyway. Niemand knew that a mentally arrested kid and a revolver don't mix. He knew that if Harry killed himself, Graham might quite the project or hi might even kill himself because of the loss of his son. Better yet, if Harry killed Graham, the weapon project would fall through because there was no one to build the weapon.

When Niemand said, "'but may Chicken Little always be wrong about the sky falling down," I thought he meant that someday the weapon project would fall through, and that very day was the day that Niemand was going to carry out his plot against Graham he was going to make the sky fall on Chicken Little's head.

I thought that this story was long enough. I think that the ending made it's point. I don't think that Niemand's plan had to work for the story to end. I think that the purpose of the story was to show that you can't trust anyone, not even people who appear to be harmless like Dr. Niemand.

I thought that this story was very exciting. Some people say that it was blunt. They're probably right, but, that's what this story should be. This story had the raw basics. It didn't need emotions and everything else like that because it was different. It was the type of story that you don't read much. I thought that it was a pretty good thriller.

Toby

In this exchange Toby continues where he left off in his "hobbit" journal, by writing lengthy entries displaying his own very personal brand of response. In his initial entry, Toby documents his reactions to the characters and their circumstances while reading through the story. Toby was one of the few who kept these kinds of running notes as he read these short selections. Toby's response should have provided Douglas with a lot to write about, as I have said already. It didn't; Douglas simply responded with questions that have little to do with Toby's response. Undaunted, Toby tried to

start a dialogue by answering Douglas's questions, but Douglas failed to continue his line of inquiry and shifted his focus again to a question about Niemand's allusion to Chicken Little. Note the difference between Toby's summative response and Douglas's.

For the other two selections in this unit the pattern remained the same: in one journal Nancy and Toby engaged in an active and connected dialogue, in another Nancy struggled in trying to get Douglas to re-examine the texts, and in the last Toby wrote extensive entries (which gradually became shorter) that wouldn't really get responded to (at least not by Douglas). But, this grouping of Nancy, Douglas, and Toby, more than any other grouping, accurately illustrated both the potential and the limitations of the PDRJ's. When two partners can write to each other, answering specific questions and remarking on particular reactions or insights, the results can be quite positive; students learn best when they are actively and personally involved. But when one partner does not make an attempt to connect with, or simply doesn't have the ability to connect with the other the results can be frustrating for both partners.

Leila, Peter and Gerry

In working with Nancy on The Hobbit, Leila had proven to be an effective co-respondant; her replies to Nancy were direct and honest. For the purposes of this unit Leila was paired with two of the boys (Peter and Gerry) who showed some potential, but really didn't put a whole lot of work into their journals. I had hoped that the new format and its clearer expectations might bring about a change in the way that these two approached the task of writing in their journals.

Just like the last group I discussed, this grouping worked and then again it didn't. In Leila's journal, Leila and Peter did a good job of responding to the text and of responding to each other, as their first exchange on The Weapon shows:

"The Weapon"

-I think Dr.Graham is a very logical and understanding person, at first he

wouldn't accept that his son was "brain damaged", but then later on he did, which shows he can accept human weaknesses.

-The weapon is it the revolver or the weapon Dr. Graham is working on?" I think it is the revolver in a way, because the story starts when Dr. Graham is thinking about his son, who is mentally retarded(a humans weakness), and then this stranger(Niemand) gave the boy a revolver, which also shows some kind of madness. This story is not about a weapon, as we think of a weapon, but of the weapon in your mind, once your mind is gone you have nothing.

-Niemand in Dutch means "nobody", and it shows what kind of person would give a boy(in mind) a revolver!

Leila

Leila,

-I think that Dr.Graham did accept that his child was mentally disabled in the beginning of the story. Harry(his son) wanted a story read to him and he wanted a childish story, he was 15.

-Yesterday I was wondering what weapon the title was talking about and I thought about it and I think that it is a revolver.

-The human mind is a weapon if used the wrong way

-Maybe the author meant to call the stranger Niemand that name because it meant "nobody" in Dutch. That would keep the story interesting because of the meaning of his name.

-I think that Niemand was a peace activist and wanted to kill Dr.Graham so the big weapon would not be built. By giving the gun to Harry he would shoot Dr.Graham without knowing it was wrong. You might say if he was a peace activist why would he kill Dr.Graham that is not peaceful. Well, those guys are nuts.

In this first exchange Leila and Peter show the flexibility of the PDRJs. Students are free to make their own observations and carry on very different conversations. Like

many of her fellow classmates, Leila starts her initial entry with an observation about the character of Dr. Graham. But, Leila's appraisal of Dr. Graham is different from the appraisals Nancy, Toby and Douglas gave. While Nancy and Toby said that the doctor showed only unconditional love for his son, and while Douglas voiced concerns that the doctor was mean to his son, Leila comes up somewhere in the middle; she feels that within himself the doctor has struggled and might still be struggling to accept his son's condition. Leila's appraisal of the doctor is supported by a passage from the text:

> Mostly he thought about his mentally arrested son -- his only son -- in the next room. The thoughts were loving thoughts, not the bitter anguish he had felt when he had first learned of the boy's condition. The boy was happy; wasn't that the main thing? And to how many men is given a child who will always be a child, who will not grow up to leave him?

The PDRJs allowed Nancy, Toby, Douglas, Leila and Peter to make their own evaluations of the characters in the story and to discuss and test these evaluations before getting input from the teacher and the rest of the class. The process of inquiry they experienced has two of the most important ingredients for the best recipe for learning: it is an active process and it is an individualized process. Reading, writing about and discussing stories in a small forum allows students to feel comfortable with the text and allows these students to take ownership of their response and interpretation of the text.

In her initial entry Leila also raises a point that the whole class struggled with: "Just what is 'The Weapon' that the title refers to?" Some of the answers that students gave to Leila's question included the gun, the device that Dr. Graham was building, Harry (used as a weapon against his dad), and, as Leila and Peter suggest, the human mind. Some of the students looked to me for an answer, waiting for the "right" interpretation. I told them that they were as close or as far from the "right"

interpretation as I was. The fact that the class could not agree on an answer was an important learning experience; the students came to understand that while there can be misreadings (comprehension problems brought about by misunderstanding key words, by making illogical associations, or by simply skipping over significant and revealing passages) there can also be room for differences in interpretation.

Leila's little quip about "niemand" meaning "nobody" in Dutch, also provided some discussion material for the class later on. Leila used her understanding of the word to see Niemand as a "no-mind", as some of her classmates put it. One student even described him as a "psycho killer" (psychotic murderer?). Other students used their new knowledge of this Dutch term in order to re-examine the text and they pointed out that Frederick Brown must have taken some time in selecting the names of characters. Niemand was a "small man, nondescript, obviously harmless" in the eyes of Dr. Graham, in short, a "nobody." Graham's name reminded the students of Alexander Graham Bell and Harry had a simple, down-to-earth name. This little aside in Leila's journal sparked an interesting discussion on the choices an author might make in constructing a story, a discussion that showed that these students could come to some kind of "consciously considered relationship with the text" as Jack Thomson puts it.

In his response to Leila, Peter showed what he was capable of (unlike his correspondence in The Hobbit unit). He responded to each of Leila's comments which was enough to keep Leila writing:

> *Peter:*
>
> *-I feel sorry for Harry, he doesn't know what's going on when he's holding the gun; he doesn't even know what it is.*
>
> *-I don't think Niemand wanted to kill Dr.Graham, I think he was just trying to make a point. If a kid (in mind) isn't ready for the revolver, how can the human race be ready for the ultimate weapon?*
>
> *-You're right about the human mind being a weapon if you used it in the wrong way. But it can also be a weapon if used the right way.*

Dr.Graham's mind is a weapon, in a way, because he has the brains to invent "the ultimate weapon".

-What do you think the "ultimate weapon" is? because I have no idea.

-The weapon the title is talking about is the revolver in a round about way. It is the revolver that proves this point.

Leila

Here, in response to Peter's assertion that Niemand was a "nut" and wanted Harry to kill his father, Leila offers another view of Niemand's motives. In their first few journal entries, most of the students saw Niemand the way Peter did, as a bit of a crackpot who was ready to kill in order to get his way and not as crusader of good who makes one final gamble, albeit a deadly one, in order to save the world. Most students did not see that Niemand might be able to stop the building of the weapon without killing anyone; all he needed was for Dr. Graham to realize that "...only a madman would give a loaded revolver to an idiot." By the end of our study on "The Weapon" most of the students shared Leila's view.

In his next entry Peter moves away from the text for a moment to make a commentary on what he sees as the major source of grief in society today:

Leila,

I like your view of the story except for one thing. I think the world is ready for the "ultimate weapon" but the question is, When would it be used? With all the treaties and the breaking up of Communism I see no need to use an "ultimate weapon". The problem is Harry does not know what the revolver is. If there was an "ultimate weapon" I am sure that you would know what it is if you saw it. I think that the "ultimate weapon" has been made already, I would call it money although I don't think that is the weapon in the story.

Money is the most dangerous thing; it causes fights, deaths, and wars. The ultimate weapon in the story is probably a big bomb or huge laser that could obliterate the moon in one shot. Sounds like some thing out of a science fiction book.

I think that the title is not talking about the gun or the ultimate weapon but the mind.

Peter

Peter's response shows a great deal of reflection. He has used the story as we might hope him to, as a springboard for examining the nature and condition of the society around him.

In her summative entry, Leila wraps up a few of her burning questions and deals with a few of the questions that came out of the class discussion:

Final Entry,

Story complete?

Story end right?

Harry weapon?

What is weapon?

Niemand mean about sky falling?

Where's mom?

(notes from the class discussion)

After the class discussion we had yesterday, I changed my mind about the story not being complete. I think the story is complete and it has the right ending. "Only a madman would give a loaded revolver to an idiot." With an ending like that the author gives you something to think about, it leaves you thinking about the story. The story is open ended; it leaves you to think your own things on the story such as: Is Harry the weapon? In a way I think he might be. Niemand used Harry and the revolver to get a point across. The weapon might be the mind too because if you don't have a developed mind you have almost nothing. If the "ultimate weapon" is an atomic bomb or something, I would say that Niemand meant that the sky was literally going to fall. If someone drops an atomic bomb, its almost like the sky is falling. Where's Harry's mom? I don't think that question is very

important, but, I think she might have died giving birth to him, which caused him to be mentally arrested.

Leila's summative entry shows personal growth in several ways. She has reconciled the "hint" ending Frederick Brown chose and put away her need for "happiness binding" as Squire might put it. She has learned that each reader is entitled to have a unique and personal response to a work of literature. And, in her response to the question about the missing mother, she has shown appreciation for the economy and artistic unity of Brown's story. All three of these aspects could have been *taught* in a teacher lecture to the class shortly after reading the story together, but would these aspects have been *caught* by the students in the way that Leila has understood them?

Leila and Peter proved to be quite an effective pairing; Peter and Gerry were not as successful, as this hurried series on "The Stag" would show:

Gerry,

I hate this poem. It is boring. Makes me want to go to sleep because it is not full of action. It may have a lot of meaning but I think it is dumb. Some people could pull meanings out of a poem. The only thing I pull out is that he is against hunting.

Peter

Peter,

Big meaning response. No meaning reply. 'Cept where did you get this part that's against hunting? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

Gerry

Gerry,

Where do I get that he is against hunting? I DON'T KNOW!!! It was one of the very few things I thought of when I read the poem. It is a dumb poem.

Peter

Peter

I agree! Good Idea! Whatever!

Gerry

Gerry,

Gerry, I can't believe the amount you write and I could reply to everything you said. I get the picture you did not get much out of this poem either.

Peter

If I circulated this response around to try and convince others that PDRJs are a worthwhile and effective methodology for the teaching of literature I would get a few rather nasty looks, I imagine. But even an exchange like this last one can tell a classroom teacher a number of things. One thing it tells us is that just because the teacher happens to like a poem, it does not necessarily follow that his students will. Another thing it tells us is that pairings are very important. Although quite a number of students voiced their dislike of the poem, very few pairings wrote as little as this one did. But, perhaps, more than anything, an exchange like this tells us that some students might just find some poems just a little too difficult and may need help in making it more accessible. In his correspondence with Leila, Peter confessed that the poem left him a little bewildered and frustrated:

Leila,

How in the world did you pull anything out of that poem? I read it and nothing comes out of it to me. I don't know why but it is like that in this poem. Now that you show me something you are most likely right he probably does feel safe in his "private forest". Animals have territory and if this deer was a buck or stag he would have a certain area that no other male deer should come into. Maybe the stag was driven into another stag's territory.

Maybe it could be compared to a nerdy kid in a school yard and the hunters are the popular group. They are always trying to get rid of the nerd.

With this last entry we can see the benefit of having two journalling partners. With Gerry Peter simply blew-off the poem, but after reading Leila's initial response, and after expressing his own frustration, Peter started to make insightful statements in Leila's journal.

In all fairness to Peter and Gerry, the exchanges they made on The Weapon and on "On The Sidewalk Bleeding" were much better than this last one. In fact, on one exchange on "On The Sidewalk Bleeding" Peter and Gerry started to play around with poetic response:

Gerry,

This worlds a cruel place
It would be better in outer space
With the calm all around
And nobody raises a sound
Andy's about to die
Before he takes his last sigh
He wants to kiss his girl friend good bye
She sees him and starts to cry
Guardians make his blood boil
No one helped him because he was a Royal

Peter

Peter,

This is such a cool response
So I write back today
I hope this does commence
It should be here to stay
Some guy gets cigarettes
Gets stabbed in an alley chase
Some kids come and kiss

He wants his girlfriends face
His jacket started the mess
It's the end of Andy's race.
Gerry

On one level it may seem that the two boys tried to avoid the more "meaty" and serious discussions of their classmates and chose instead to have a little fun and play with some rhyming words, but, if we look a little closer we can see that both boys have isolated some of the ideas and events that best represent the artistic thrust of the story.

Dennis, Ian and Wendy

The third group, Dennis, Ian and Wendy, was made up of three quite different personalities. Dennis was a student who found language arts class to be quite frustrating; especially when it came to discussions on literature. He read very little on his own and was more interested in physical activities. To me Dennis was a bit of an enigma, for he was a student of very few words. Seldom did he write or say more than a few sentences, so I often wasn't sure if Dennis had a comprehension problem or just a problem in communicating. I decided to put Dennis in a group with Ian and Wendy because they both wrote easily and confidently. The differences among the three students was quite evident already in the very first entry in each of their respective journals. In Dennis's first entry he voices some of his frustration with Brown's story and shows no sign of realising that Brown may have been using the three characters to reveal a "deeper" message:

Ian,

I did not enjoy this story because I found it to be very boring because nothing happened. In a sense this story was kind of stupid. I kind of doubt that a person would give a mentally handicapped boy a gun. What kind of weapon was Dr.Graham building? I think that Dr.Graham should take the

gun and blow Niemand away. Well, maybe not.

Dennis

In the next few entries Ian does his best to explain to Dennis that the characters and the events have a greater significance:

Dennis,

I think that Niemand gave Harry a gun to get his point across. He had to shock Graham into realizing what he was doing by building a horrible weapon. The weapon was probably a nuclear or hydrogen bomb, because Graham said he was building the bomb to help science. Chemical weapons and things like that would not help science, but nuclear bombs led to nuclear reactors and other energy sources for human use.

I didn't really find the story boring. Things did happen. There was no fighting or anything but Niemand gave the boy the gun. Why did you think this story was stupid?

Ian

If Dennis had been grouped with another of his close friends (Peter, Ellis, Gerry, or Douglas), the reply to his first response would have simply echoed Dennis's thoughts. ("Yeah, I thought it was dumb too...") But Ian does not take the easy way out. Ian confronts Dennis with a different point of view; he feels there is a point to the story and that the story wasn't all that boring or stupid. Dennis's second response shows that he followed Ian's argument and even considered it:

Ian,

I kind of thought he was building a nuclear bomb. I thought it was stupid that Niemand gave the gun to Harry. If he wanted to get his point across he should have come out and told Dr.Graham how terrible the weapon would be and try to convince him to stop building the weapon.

Dennis

By the end of the exchange process, Dennis has changed his view of the story, and although he doesn't say whether or not he still believes the story is boring or stupid, he does show that he has a better understanding of Niemand's motive for giving Harry the gun:

> *Final Response*
>
> *Answering the question who or what is the weapon, I think the weapon probably was Harry. When Niemand gave the gun to Harry it made Dr Graham realize that building a bomb is the wrong thing to do. Niemand was also trying to get his point across when he gave Harry the gun.*

Although the exchanges on the next two texts ("The Stag" and "On The Sidewalk Bleeding") were not as impressive as this one (Dennis would still only write a few lines), they did show that Ian could help his partner to re-examine the text and re-evaluate his response to it.

In his own journal Ian leap-frogs some of the more immediate types of response and proceeds into a thoughtful critique of what he perceived as Brown's purpose in writing the story:

> *Wendy,*
>
> *Brown's use of characters is both fair and unfair. It is unfair to call all humans Harry and all scientists as Dr.Graham, but generally I think the example is a good one. Most scientists would be the last ones to recommend the use of such a devastating weapon as a nuclear bomb, while most of the general public sees the weapon as destroying enemies, not people. Most people are ignorant of the actual effects of a nuclear bomb besides the explosion. Harry, who cannot think things through all the way is a good example of this ignorance.*
>
> *What struck me in this story was the way that Mr.Niemand makes*

his point. When Niemand says,"but may Chicken Little always be wrong about the sky falling down", he makes a blunt statement of his feelings about the weapon to Dr.Graham. Even more bluntly he gives the loaded revolver to Harry. Then Dr.Graham realizes the danger of the weapon when he says to himself,"Only a madman would give a loaded revolver to an idiot."

Ian

Ian, after reading a couple of "leading" questions, had already made the assumption that Brown's story is a thinly-veiled attempt to criticize the scientific community for giving an ignorant populace weapons of mass destruction. At first, Ian's interpretive "leap" was a little hard for Wendy to follow:

Ian,

Where did you get the Nuclear Bomb from? What I read in the story was that it was about a 15 year old boy who is still a child, while you are talking about nuclear bombs. And the story says nothing about the general public unless your talking about the fact that Niemand is talking about the chance of human race's survival. Now I understand more of your writing. Because if the nuclear bomb is the weapon that Graham is working on, then of course it will kill lots of people. I like your point about Chicken Little, it makes a lot of sense.

Wendy

After reading Wendy's reply Ian realized that he had to do a little more explaining in order to clarify his critique; it is an important lesson for a student for whom things come rather easily.

Wendy,

I got the idea of a nuclear bomb from a couple of things. 1) A weapon of ultimate destructive power 2) Dr.Graham said,"Yes, it is public

knowledge that I am working on a weapon, a rather ultimate one. But, for me personally, that is only a by product of the fact that I am advancing science." But nuclear bombs led to the first nuclear reactors.

I don't think that Harry is the main character in this story. I think he is there so Niemand can make his point to Dr.Graham. I think that this story is basically a plea by Fredrick Brown against weapons of mass destruction.

The general public is in the story indirectly. When Niemand gives the gun to Harry, he makes his views known. "Only a madman would give a loaded revolver to an idiot." Niemand here makes Dr.Graham reason that by giving the weapon to the government, he ultimately gives it to the general public. The general public are ignorant people who could pressure politicians(people who are concerned about their approval rating) into using the weapon.

Why did you think the story was about a 15 year old boy?

Ian

Ian's second response is much clearer than the first; it is almost like a second-draft or revision. In this exchange Ian and Wendy have unwittingly proved another of the valuable by-products in the PDRJ process. Although Wendy may not have given Ian anything new to think about, she has forced him to think about how he must express himself and how he needs to give supportive examples when making both general and specific evaluations.

In his summative response to Wendy, Ian showed that he is a very perceptive reader; he has gained an appreciation for the artistic construction of the story. Ian has also shown that he is a mature reader; he has reflected on the significance of the events, reviewed the whole work as the author's creation. Ian is very close to what Thomson would call a "consciously considered relationship with the text." Ian has also shown that he hasn't let his own "search for certainty" (as Squire calls it) interfere with his appreciation of the story. Ian feels that the story was complete

even though he wasn't sure who was the real villain of the story:

Final Response

"The Weapon" is a good story. It had everything tie into the main idea, and was well written. Some people thought the story was incomplete, that it didn't end. I think that the story is finished, and lets you draw your own conclusion about Dr.Graham's opinions. Instead of the author giving you his ideas of what happened to Dr.Graham. I think that Dr.Graham realized that he was lying to himself about the scientific value of the bomb. I think that he will stop justifying his work on the weapon and quit his work on the weapon. After Niemand shocked him into seeing what he really was doing, I don't think the Graham could live with himself anymore.

Who is the villain in this story? Is it Niemand, who gives the loaded revolver to Harry, or Graham who is working on the weapon?

In their written dialogue about "The Weapon" Wendy and Dennis sorted out many of their confusions but in a much different manner than they did with Ian. Wendy starts the process with an entry that reveals a failure to grasp some of the implications of the details and events in the context of the story, and a need for "the right kind of ending" ("happiness binding"):

"The Weapon"

Dennis,

In the beginning Graham thoughts were about how he loved his mentally arrested son, but then in the last paragraph he saw his son as an idiot. Why would he first say he loved his son and then call him an idiot?

He definitely misjudged Niemand for being harmless. Does it mean that he's had harmful people, to his son, come to him before?

I think the author should have continued with the story because you

don't know what happens, you don't know Niemand's purpose for being there, so it seems incomplete.

It is symbolic how the title is "The Weapon" and Graham is working on a weapon while an innocent "child" is given a dangerous weapon.

Do you think the loaded revolver is the weapon Graham is working on?

After reading the story I got the feeling that Niemand was someone who was against all kinds of weapons, and anything else to do with them. That might be why he gave a loaded revolver to Harry, to show his anger or hate, to get across a point(who knows)

Niemand said that Graham's work was something that would end the human race's chance for survival. He might be referring to all the violence in the world, the wars which are unnecessary, the brutal killing, and all the people who have been killed by weapons, such as the revolver.

Wendy

Just like Wendy, Dennis is confused by his own understanding of the term "idiot" (the connotation of the word was interfering with the denotation), but Dennis is helpful on two other points:

Wendy,

I have no idea why Dr.Graham loved his son at the beginning and then thought he was an idiot! Did you enjoy the story because I thought the story was kind of boring and stupid. Coming back to the second question, I think that Dr.Graham had harmful people coming to him. If he didn't have harmful people coming to him then he wouldn't have thought about whether Niemand was harmful or harmless. Coming to the third question, I do not know . I thought Dr.Graham was building a weapon for war.

Dennis

Even though Dennis could not help Wendy in the way that Ian might be able or a teacher might be able, he did provide an effective "listener" (reader). Dennis' admission that he found the story to be boring and stupid gave Wendy the confidence to write more about her own frustration. This raises another important point about the PDRJs; if I had proceeded directly into a class discussion after reading this story the discussion in all likelihood would have become dominated by those who immediately saw the "deeper structure" of the story (Ian, Nancy, Maureen, Toby, and Ardyth). Students like Dennis and Wendy would have felt intimidated and would not have shared their frustration. Both students would have felt that they were alone in their difficulty. "The Weapon" is a challenging read for a grade nine student (that's one of the reasons why I selected it); there should be no reason for students to feel embarrassed when they find it incomplete and confusing.

In their second exchange Wendy and Dennis continued to voice their frustration about the "stupid" story, while at the same time they clarified a few details and ended up changing their opinions of both Graham and Niemand:

Dennis,

I have to agree with you, the story was boring and stupid. I didn't like it. It was incomplete, and it didn't all make sense.

I think you're right that Graham was building a war weapon. It must have been a bomb of some sort, to scare people like Mr.Niemand(because not many weapons make people like Niemand do what he did)

Now that I think of it I don't think Mr.Niemand was the harmful one and the madman, but Dr.Graham was.

I think this whole story is not very realistic, because who is really going to give a mental, a loaded revolver?

I don't understand the point of the story, it's kind of confusing, in the beginning I thought the story was about someone giving a "mental" a gun (the weapon) now I see that Graham was the main person in the story, and he was working on a dangerous weapon. Basically it was stupid!

Wendy

Wendy,

I agree now that I think of it Dr.Graham was probably the madman in the story if he was building some kind of war weapon or bomb. Maybe Niemand gave the gun to Harry to make Dr.Graham realize that building a bomb is the wrong thing to do. If you really think of this story it would probably make sense. At first it didn't make sense to me either but then I thought of the story for a while.

Dennis

Dennis and Wendy, through their correspondence with each other and through their work with Ian, went through a very effective learning process. Both were able to make important realizations each in their own way and each on their own time; they did not have to feel pressured by class discussion, teacher lecture or even leading questions. Wendy's summative response shows that correspondence and class discussion can lead to a whole new appreciation of a rather difficult story:

Final Response,

I think Harry might have been a weapon as well as the atomic bomb might have been a weapon. I think Dr.Niemand gave Harry the gun so he might shoot himself or his father. If he shot himself then Graham would be taken away from his work for awhile. But if Harry shot his father the project would stop right there. But even without any-one dying Mr.Niemand had gotten his point across. When Mr.Niemand was talking about chicken little and the sky falling, I think it meant that once the atomic bomb was used and dropped out of the sky, the "public" world would seem to be falling, as in Chicken little the sky was falling.

After the responses and discussions we had, I think that the story is complete. It gets the point across but in an indirect way. By giving a gun to Harry, Mr.Niemand made the point that the weapon Graham was building is dangerous and it end the chance of survival for humans. Just as the

revolver was dangerous. And Mr. Niemand was not the madman but Graham was!

A Few Conclusions about "Two Stories and a Poem"

As the last of the three studies and probably the most successful, the PDRJ unit: "Two Stories and a Poem" revealed quite a bit about the practical worth of a written peer-dialogue process. Before this unit, both the teacher and the students had worked with PDRJs and so both knew what to expect. At the start of this unit the students were provided with a clear set of expectations in the form of a mini-lecture, hand-outs (one on the process itself and several others giving rather open-ended writing starts), and examples from previous units. During the unit most of the students took their work seriously. And, after the unit, the students gave both oral and written feedback.

The need to sort things out and think things through was more apparent in the short story and poem units than in the novel unit. Because of the nature of the reading, The Hobbit led students to relate more of their immediate impressions and make a few reflective connections. The units involving short stories and poems included literature which evoked more analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Because of this difference, I believe that the five-entry, eight-stage exchange process used in the second and third study would have been totally inappropriate for the PDRJ unit on The Hobbit. Nobody I know likes to be stopped time and time again while they are reading an involving work of fiction of any length. When the students wrote upon the stories or poems, they didn't have to stop part way through. They could write up all their responses after they finished reading.

The fact that I chose the groupings rather than let the students choose probably contributed to the success of this unit. Good buddies, who would likely not push their friends into extending and elaborating on their responses (like Dennis and Peter) were separated. Students who wrote little in The Hobbit unit were put in groups with serious yet sensitive correspondents, students who could provoke dialogue

with well-placed comments and questions. Placed in such an interdependent environment, many of the less motivated students found themselves pushed into an active and accountable process of reading and writing.

Of course, as with any approach to literature, the PDRJ approach was not completely successful with every student; there were several dissappointing journals. But, in general, most of the students did an admirable job in starting and maintaining effective dialogues. The students, through their dialogues, formed, shaped and tested various responses to literature. These dialogues proved that students need to explore their immediate impressions and reflective connections before moving to distanced judgements. The dialogues also proved that many of these grade nine students were quite capable of making informed and thoughtful interpretations and evaluations when given enough time to work through the literature by themselves and with a partner. If we, as teachers, allow our students to discuss and debate literature and their response to literature in non-threatening forums such as the PDRJ, we will give our students a better opportunity to become autonomous readers who can reach a consciously considered relationship with the text.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings of the Study

The general aim of this study was to explore the use of peer dialogue journals in the classroom in order to judge their worth as a methodology for the discussion of literature in a classroom setting. More specifically the study was aimed at examining a peer dialogue process and judging the effectiveness of such a process with regards to allowing for individual student differences, stimulating a depth and variety in response, encouraging enjoyment and appreciation, improving reading and writing skills, and easing teacher workloads without compromising the education of students.

Allowing For Individual Student Differences

While a lecture approach to the study of literature has its place as an effective way to efficiently present contextual information pertaining to the literature, or time-tested scholarly reviews and analysis of the literature, it denies each student the opportunity to transact with the literature and construct meaning in a more personal and individualistic way. A question and answer worksheet approach using a range of open-ended questions might allow for some of the reading and response differences between the students, but most worksheets have a hidden agenda: the questions are carefully chosen in order to lead all the students to realize one interpretation of the text. Dialogue journals between each student and the teacher permit the student to explore literature and their response to it in a more personalised and social forum, but many students are still only too aware of the fact that they are writing to someone who at one point or another will be their evaluator. For many of the students the need to posture and to exaggerate in order to impress the teacher is just too great; these students will deny themselves the opportunity to honestly explore the literature and their response to it and will instead opt to play a game in which they write what they think the teacher wants to read.

In contrast with a lecture approach, which often short-circuits the student's meaning-making process and proceeds to discuss the literature at a level that only few in the class are comfortable with or able to comprehend, the PDRJ approach to the teaching of literature as implemented in this study can accommodate a range in student ability to read and respond. The PDRJs allowed these students to read and discuss each piece of literature at their own level of understanding. While some students were using their journals to sort out their difficulties in comprehension in the attempt to "get into the story", other students were already giving a distanced evaluation effectively using details from the story and aspects of their own response in order to support this evaluation.

In contrast to a question and answer or worksheet approach to literature which dictates the topics for discussion and often the general theme of discussion, the PDRJ approach to literature can allow for a wide range of student interests. In this study students explored their wide range of interests related to their own personal transaction with literature. Some students chose to relate unique visualisations of characters (often comparing them to parents, friends, t.v. stars, and characters in other stories and poems). Some students placed themselves in the text by recognizing the pressures and demands placed on the main character, by empathising with and expressing concerns and hopes for this character. Some students made comparisons between texts or authors and stated their preferences as readers and literary critics. And some students gave unique and often convincing interpretations of the text based on personal observation and insight.

The PDRJ units also eliminated much of the posturing and exaggerating that is often found in student-to-teacher dialogue response journals. Although several of the students were quite aware of their secondary audience and initially seemed to slip in comments with the obvious intention of impressing the teacher, they soon abandoned such posturing and proceeded to write direct responses and replies to their more immediate audience, their journal partners. For most of the students the correspondence with a peer meant an open and honest exchange of ideas, an exchange among equals in which each of the correspondents was free to accept or

reject the insights of the other. For a few of the students though, the exchange was not so equal. Some students felt intimidated by their correspondent and lacked the courage to share their impressions with a student whom they saw as either too smart or too "cool" to relate to their ideas. For these few students the peer dialogue process was not much different than a student-to-teacher dialogue process; in fact they might even have missed the sensitivity that an experienced teacher could provide.

Stimulating Variety and Depth in Response

This study reinforced what Atwell had already discovered when she had students keep response journals with each other; that response journals kept between students contain more instances of primary and emotional response (immediate impressions) than student-to-teacher journals do. One obvious explanation for the wealth of immediate impressions found in the journals is the fact that many of the students were sharing their reactions to the text with a close friend, and so they were not afraid to write from a more emotional and elemental point of view. These students did not feel as pressured to do literary analysis and interpretation, and so they allowed themselves more freedom to transact with the literature before coming forth with any conclusions. Another possible explanation for this abundance of primary and emotional response might be traced to the fact that students are sharing their impressions of the literature with someone who is also encountering the literature for the first time. Many students felt uncomfortable expressing their hopes and desires for particular characters to a correspondent who already knew the outcome of the story. In writing with a peer the students were given the opportunity to share their excitement, wonder, apprehensions and expectations with a fellow explorer instead of simply expressing them to a guide who had seen much of it before.

It would be a mistake, though, to assume that the PDRJs contained only immediate impressions just because there was an abundance of primary and emotional responses. In fact this study describes a wide range of response activities found in the journals. The model in which I describe the elements of response found in the PDRJs

contains no less than nineteen different types of response activities, ranging from very immediate images and associations to judgements revealing a distanced evaluation of the text and of the reader's response to the text.

The explorations in literature found in the PDRJs revealed a type of progression in response from personal involvement to distanced evaluation. This growth in response reinforced what Bogdan (1990) and Vandergrift (1990) had pointed out in earlier studies. When guiding themselves and each other through a response process to The Hobbit, the Poplar Ridge students generally moved from immediate impressions (primary and emotional responses) to reflective connections (comparative and analytic responses) to insights and evaluations (interpretive and summative responses). The PDRJ unit in Willowdale also revealed such a process and so by the time the third PDRJ unit was to be run ("Two Stories and a Poem"), this natural process was written right into the handout used to provide a focus for the unit ("Our Journal Process, p.84). In many cases, especially in the two units involving short stories, students very effectively helped each other in coming to a fuller understanding of the text and of important passages found in the text. This hand-in-hand approach to the literature fostered more thorough explorations of the literature and ultimately led to more mature and insightful interpretations and evaluations.

The PDRJ units also showed evidence of all three types of growth that I outlined earlier. When a student like Leila was pushed to explain just how she visualized the dragon, the hobbit, or Mirkwood forest, or when a student like Ian was forced to explain just how he could assume that Dr Graham represented the scientific community and that Harry represented humankind, the student was also forced into developing and expanding on one particular type of response. These students were encouraged to re-examine the text and their response to it and write a clear reply to their partner. When students like Wendy, Dennis, or Peter had to read a responses from dialogue partners who had understood or interpreted the story in a completely different way than they did, and when they were asked specifically by their partners to provide some sort of reply, these students were pulled into examining the stories in a new light. The process was personal, active and accountable. Students were

encouraged to read and relate and could not simply hide in the back of the classroom while others carried on with the lesson. When two students like Toby and Nancy had the opportunity to work with someone who carefully read, considered and replied to their own response, with someone who could point to important passages and significant events in the text, they were encouraged to make a more informed response to the text and each caused the other to grow by developing the other's skills in interrogation, analysis, and hypothesis.

Encouraging Enjoyment and Appreciation

In follow-up interviews after the Willowdale unit and the "Two Stories and A Poem" unit, most of the students said that they enjoyed and appreciated the PDRJ approach to literature. Some said that it gave them the chance to get into the story without the teacher "spoiling" it. Others appreciated the fact that they could share their reactions with a friend or classmate. Still others said that it gave them the chance to develop ideas about the story, and they felt that when the unit ended, they had become more adept at writing about literature. Of course not everybody enjoyed the PDRJs. Some students (between five and ten of the forty-five students involved) did not like the fact that they were pushed into writing almost every class. Many of these same students felt that the stories and poems were "dumb", and perhaps they were right in one respect: obviously these particular stories had little to say to these particular students. Most of the students in this group of disgruntled PDRJ writers were students of limited abilities so responding to some of the more symbolic aspects of the stories and poems might have proven to be too difficult and corresponding with classmates who pulled all sorts of images and meanings from the texts may have proven to be too intimidating.

Again, it must be stressed that the vast majority of the students enjoyed the PDRJ units, but even among this majority there were frustrations. If there was one complaint that was most dominant in the student evaluations of the unit, it would be this one: "The journal process ended up flogging some stories and poems to death!"

(Approximately one third of the students in this study stated this complaint in one way or another). In hindsight it is easy to find justification for their complaint. A story like "The Weapon", which takes all of twenty minutes to read, took between three to four periods to finish. Such a time frame is fine when the story or poem can evoke a good deal of interest and discussion (as "The Weapon" did); but when the students could find little or nothing to write about (as they did for "The Stag") the five entry, eight stage process left many of the students frustratedly staring at their journals too many times. In a classroom where the unit was not being done for research the teacher could and probably would, step in and shorten the exchange process.

Through their journals and in the follow-up interviews the students gave suggestions on how the unit could be improved (thereby promoting enjoyment). Some of the suggestions students gave asked the teacher to:

- allow students to pick their own partners,
- allow more time for writing (some students felt hurried),
- pick better selections,
- allow students to choose selections,
- make the exchange process more flexible, and
- give more time for discussion and give less time for writing.

Of course any change to the units implemented on the basis of these suggestions would in all likelihood prove to be a two-edged sword. If the teacher allowed students to choose their own partners (as I did in the first unit) some students might be left out and some pairings might not take the task very seriously. Careful consideration needs to be given in order to ensure that each respondent is matched with a correspondent who is sensitive to the respondents interests and willing to engage in thoughtful and meaningful discourse. Changing the exchange process or the literature might also have negative effects; it is difficult to balance the wants and the needs of every student. None the less all of the student suggestions deserve careful consideration, especially the suggestion to allow more choice in literature. A teacher might be able to accommodate some of the students of lesser ability by

allowing each group to respond to different novels, stories or poems. Combining such an approach with the careful selection of peer dialogue partnerships might ultimately save such students from the frustration of tackling literature that is too difficult and might also save them from the embarrassment and intimidation of corresponding with a student who has an easy time in reading and responding.

The fact that students could come at the literature on their own level and discuss the literature with friends before consulting with the teacher, did much to foster a greater appreciation of the literature. As anticipated, the dialogue exchange process allowed each

student time to sort out his or her initial response to the literature. The usual progression from personal response to shared response (between two) before engaging in a public response (class discussion) allowed each student to develop his or her own response and analysis and gain confidence through this building process. The active and accountable nature of the PDRJ pushed the students to read and re-read and to respond and correspond and all of these activities helped students to gain a feeling of "ownership" of and appreciation for the text and their response to it.

By providing immediate feedback through the exchange of journals, the dialogue process also helped students who were frustrated by their own comprehension problems. Correspondents helped their partners by clarifying language and contexts that were confusing for their partner and in doing so these correspondents eliminated some of the roadblocks on the pathway to appreciation. Although they might not have used the literary terminology found in curriculum guides and textbooks, many of these students also engaged in meaningful discussions on plot, theme, style, characterization, and point of view. For example, even though most -- if not all -- of the students were unfamiliar with the term "artistic unity," in their entries on "The Weapon "and "On the Sidewalk Bleeding" many students revealed an appreciation for the economy and form of the short story. Discussions about the author's choice of words, the possible significance of the names of the characters, and possible themes of the stories ultimately led to a greater appreciation for the literature and for the author of the literature.

Improving Reading and Writing Skills

In 1964, James Squire, in his study of The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories, cited these six sources of difficulty which interfered with ability for adolescent students to effectively interpret four short stories:

1. failure to grasp meaning including
    - misunderstanding key words and becoming lost in the narrative,
    - failure to grasp the implications of the details, and
    - incorrect inferences;
2. reliance on stock responses,
3. happiness binding,
4. critical predispositions,
5. irrelevant associations, and
6. the search for certainty.

In many ways the students in this study were no different from the ones in Squire's study, almost thirty years ago. In their journals the students in my study gave ample evidence of each of the six different sources of difficulty that Squire had identified. But the fact that the students of 1992 kept dialogue journals gave them one advantage over Squire's group; the Poplar Ridge and Willowdale students received immediate feedback from a peer. It was this feedback that helped many students to overcome at least some of the obstacles that hinder a free and meaningful transaction with the literature.

Indeed, there were many examples of students helping others. In some cases students helped others to grasp meaning: Louise learned from Henry exactly what a sniper was and this completely changed her understanding of "The Sniper"; Toby was reminded by Nancy of the story behind Chicken Little and helped him to grasp the implications of the details in "The Weapon"; and Douglas, through his dialogue with Nancy and through the class discussion, came to understand that "The Weapon" was probably not a story primarily concerned with the care and abuse of mentally challenged adults, but might have a much broader theme. Stock responses such as

Dennis's description of "The Weapon" as boring and stupid were challenged, and in many cases the students were forced to reconsider their initial response as Dennis did.

In spite of being what Squire calls "incorrigible romantics" who continually assume, infer and hope for the best, many students were pushed to "face the realities of unpleasant interpretations." This reality adjustment was especially evident in the response to "On the Sidewalk Bleeding"; students who longed for a happy ending could never-the-less see the artistic and thematic justification for Andy's death. Critical predispositions like Peter's that a story or poem has to have a lot of action in order for it to be engaging were countered by classmates who found ideas more important than actions. Irrelevant associations like Gerry's likening of British Parliament to the story of the stag and Douglas's self-comparison to Harry in "The Weapon" were carefully dismissed when a partner showed them how little evidence there was for such an association. And students who, in their search for certainty, sought television sitcom-like endings for the stories and poems, were convinced by peers that an inconclusive ending such as the ones in "The Weapon" and in "Night Drive" made for good story-telling.

Citing these examples of peer helping peer should not automatically imply that each and every source of difficulty in reading and response was dealt with and overcome. There were also many cases where partners failed to pick-up on any difficulties or chose to ignore them. But, in comparison with dialogue journals kept between teacher and student, these peer dialogue response journals fared quite well. Few teachers, especially those who teach more than one class of English, could answer as many questions and deal with as many concerns as were answered and dealt with in these PDRJs and few teachers could find the time to write as many lengthy and sincere replies (which subsequently encouraged more writing) as were found in the PDRJs.

As Atwell (1987) has already observed, students who keep journals with each other write in a more familiar style and are less worried about aspects of grammar, usage, punctuation or form then they would be if they were to correspond with their teacher. Such was certainly the case for the students in this study. Out of all the

pairings in this study, there was only one pairing for whom editing became an important and integral part of the process.

Nevertheless students did help each other with some very important aspects of effective writing. Correspondents provided each student with something that every young writer would like, an audience that gives honest and immediate feedback. The journal exchanges helped students to gauge their audience and then shape their writing accordingly. Correspondents asked for clarification, pointed out gaps in logic and pushed their partners to consider alternative viewpoints.

In the follow-up interviews almost half of the students mentioned the fact that they felt their writing had improved through the course of the PDRJ unit. Many of these students pointed out that at the beginning of the unit they found journal writing to be a chore, but by the end of the unit writing out their response became an easy and effortless task. Such progress is also substantiated by the journals themselves; in almost every journal one can notice that the entries became longer and the writing became freer as the unit progressed.

Easing Teacher Workloads

When I initially embarked on this study, it was my intention to see if the use of PDRJs could free a teacher from at least part of the heavy burden of regularly responding to student dialogue journals and to writing generally. The task of responding to each entry would be passed to one of the student's peers and the teacher would then be able to retreat into a role that was limited to monitoring the dialogue of both students and giving a little "nudge" whenever it was appropriate. This is, in fact, exactly how it transpired. In the three PDRJ units Beverly and I were freed from the steady commitment of responding at length to each and every student. If two students were carrying on an effective and meaningful exploration of the literature and their responses to it, we simply eavesdropped on their written conversations. If two other students were struggling to make conversation, we were

there to lend a helping hand by writing comments in the margin or by verbally giving advice.

But, easing the teacher from an onerous workload was only one facet of my inquiry; I was also concerned with the quality of education each student would receive when working through the literature using PDRJs. Would the students miss the insight and instruction that they were used to receiving from their teacher in their student-to-teacher dialogue journals?

The answer to this last question, like the answer to many questions, is a very firm "Yes and no."

Yes, some students missed their teacher's one-on-one responses. Peers were often just as lost in comprehending the details of the narrative as their partners were. Peers just did not have the knowledge and insight that comes with years of study in the field of literary appreciation. And peers often lacked sensitivity and could not or would not give the nurturing support that an experienced teacher could give. This is not to say that all the students could help their partners the way a teacher could. In fact many students proved to be quite effective in teaching their partners to consider carefully and thoughtfully the literature from a number of different angles before arriving at a final or summative response. When Ian convinced both Wendy and Dennis that the short story "The Weapon" was complete even with its hint ending, he did the job as well as any teacher could. And, even though the teachers were not giving extensive written responses to each of the students, both Beverly and I found other ways to help the students as they wrestled with the literature. We both scheduled time for the students to communicate their concerns and questions to us (in the form of class discussions) and, when we noticed that certain students had difficulties because they could not comprehend the language or the context of the literature, we gave "mini-lectures" aimed at filling in some of the missing details.

Yes, some students missed their teacher's regular and written input, but many more did not. Perhaps this is because, as I have said before, PDRJs and student-to-teacher dialogue response journals are two very different response activities, each of which has its own attractions. In student-to-teacher dialogue journals the

teacher can skilfully help each student explore the literature by giving the guidance and support the student needs when he or she needs it. But, many students feel constrained by student-to-teacher journals. They feel a need to perform for the teacher and they feel awkward about sharing their immediate responses (expressions of interest, emotion and anticipation) with a more mature and experienced reader. In writing the PDRJs the students of Poplar Ridge and Willowdale sometimes missed the steady hand of their teacher for guidance, but most made up for this loss by sharing more of their immediate responses (primary and emotional), doing less posturing for marks, engaging in a more personal and earnest inquiry, and writing longer, more meaningful, responses and replies.

Recommendations for Teaching

There are many recommendations for implementation that I can now make on the basis of my experience in organizing, observing and administrating literature studies using a PDRJ approach. Most of these recommendations can be summarized by three directives to English teachers: be flexible, be an effective model, and keep in touch.

Students and teachers should not become slaves to one particular PDRJ procedure. Circumstances might dictate a need to vary the type of journal activity. Some of the most important aspects to consider are the literature and the students.

As was proven in this study, short stories, novels, and poems present different challenges for the PDR journalist. Of the three genres, short stories seem to be well suited to the process that was developed through this study. Stories such as Brown's "The Weapon", Lessing's "Through the Tunnel" and Hunter's "On The Sidewalk Bleeding" evoked both range and depth in response. From the entries on these stories it was easy to trace a natural progression from immediate impressions to distanced evaluations. The other two genres were not as well-suited to the the eight-stage, five entry process.

Novels, due to their length, necessitate a much different PDRJ process than do short stories or poems. Student enjoyment of novels can be spoilt by an intrusive journal process. The use of episodic novels (like The Hobbit) can minimize the problem of untimely interuptions, but it cannot eliminate them. In the Poplar Ridge unit on The Hobbit most felt comfortable sharing immediate impressions and reflective connections as they read the novel, but very few felt the need to carry on extended dialogues on specific topics. Most of the real discussion and debate was saved for when both partners had actually finished the novel. Novels that have a less episodic format might necessitate a PDRJ approach that would allow each student to keep simple log of reading impressions, to be shown to a dialogue partner only after the novel had been finished by both students. The students would then be asked to use the reading logs as a springboard for topics to be discussed in PDRJs. Partners might choose to make comparisons about each other's reading interests and reading processes or they may use the logs to identify issues and topics for discussion and debate.

Poems, due to their complexity, necessitate a PDRJ process that allows each student time to deal with the images and ideas to be found in them. Both Poplar Ridge and Willowdale students felt that they needed to say something about the "deep meanings" found in the poems that they read. Sometimes they were successful (as they were when they wrote about Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken"), but other times they were frustrated by poems that were not as accessible. Poems like Updike's "Ex-Basketball Player" or Hughes' "The Stag" elicited immediate responses like "This sucks!" and "What a stupid poem!." Only after class discussion did many of these same students begin to see and relate to some of the images and ideas in these poems. Perhaps class discussion should come at the beginning of a PDRJ process when it comes to studying poetry. Most of the students in this study had difficulty writing about the poems because they felt that the poems were like jigsaw puzzles; you need time to sort out all the pieces before you can make an attempt at making a picture. Assigning the poems ahead of time and allowing students to come back to certain poems several times over an extended period of time might allow journalists

time to work through the poetry before feeling the push to write in response.

Different classes have different interests. In this study the Willowdale group seemed to have a greater need to talk while they wrote their journals, whereas the Poplar Ridge students did most of their talking through the journals. Stories that both the Willowdale and Poplar Ridge students of 1992 successfully studied and discussed in the dialogue journals fared very poorly in dialogue journal units at Poplar Ridge the next year, and stories that the 1992 groups hated found appreciation in 1993.

Different students have different needs. Some students need to be paired with a close friend; writing about literature to someone they don't know very well is too much of a risk. Other students will write quality responses only when they are paired with someone who is *not* a close friend, Some students welcome a partnership with a more experienced and skilled reader and writer, while other students are intimidated by such a grouping. Each student has unique and varied interests, so grouping can be very difficult. I suggest that teachers carefully consider the needs of the class and of particular individual students when assigning students to dialogue partnerships. Letting students choose their own partners, or simply assigning partners according to some random order can cause major problems especially for unpopular students.

Varying the procedures and mixing up the partnerships on a regular basis might also be quite advantageous. Teachers and students might experiment with journal exchange procedures which involve more than two students. In Willowdale, the dominating effect that single students could have on dialogue groups was lessened when the exchange procedure was restructured. Teachers might also stimulate a greater range in response by periodically mixing up the partnerships. Students can tire of one another's interests and hobby-horses.

Students must be taught how to effectively perform their duties as PDRJ correspondents. Students need to learn how to read their partner's responses and to write sincere responses to them. Too often students only skim over their partner's writings and then write replies that have more to do with their own interests than their partner's. Students also need to learn how to gently nudge their partners in

order to facilitate healthy inquiry and debate. Through the use of handouts and class discussion, these two very important skills might be *taught* by a teacher but, these same skills will only be *caught* if they have been effectively modelled first. By using student-to-teacher dialogue journals before starting a PDRJ unit or by providing a third voice in the dialogue journals, teachers can effectively show their students how to read and reply with sensitivity and encouragement.

Teachers who keep dialogue journals with their students are often quite aware of their students preferences, interests, abilities, and weaknesses. Student-teacher journals provide an effective forum for one-on-one interaction; teachers can assess, tutor, coax and praise their students in such journals. But, as has been mentioned before, keeping up with student-teacher journals can be time consuming for an English language arts teacher. Easing the burden of student-to-teacher journals was one of the primary reasons for this study.

But, teachers who switch to a PDRJ approach might easily lose touch with their students. In order to keep a finger on the pulse of the class, English teachers need to take in and carefully read the PDRJ's on a regular basis. Reading the PDRJs while the unit is ongoing can alert teachers to students struggling with problems in understanding meaning and context, or struggling with personality clashes. Regular readings can also keep the teacher informed regarding the students interests and abilities.

For English teachers, keeping in touch might also mean giving little nudges to particular students by writing in the PDRJs. Even though the teacher is no longer their primary audience the students are still very much aware of a teacher reader. Appropriately placed questions, comments, tid-bits of contextual information, and statements of praise, all serve to stimulate and encourage growth.

Concluding Thoughts

Literature studies which employ the use of PDRJs are an effective way to help students to chronicle and expand upon their explorations in literature. The attractions of using a PDRJ unit in the classroom are clear. A PDRJ unit can provide each student with the opportunity to personally and individually transact with the literature before coming to an evaluative stance. A PDRJ unit can stimulate students to engage in numerous and varied response activities from simple picturing to recognising significant themes and presenting critical evaluations of them. PDRJ units also provide opportunities for growth in understanding and appreciation. Students can encourage each other, help each other with difficulties in comprehension and analysis, fill in some of the gaps that each might have regarding historical or social contexts of the literature, and gently nudge each other to deeper levels of response and analysis through the use of well-placed questions. For many students, the PDRJs provide a forum in which they can share and exchange responses without feeling the intimidation that might be felt by these same students had they been forced to share their responses in a larger group setting.

PDRJs units can put the onus for learning back where it belongs, on each student's shoulders. Instead of passively assimilating other peoples' perspectives and interpretations, the students are given a very active challenge. Each student is given three important responsibilities: to read carefully, to respond sincerely and thoughtfully, and to reply to their partner's responses in a helpful and encouraging way. In living up to these responsibilities, students will often find themselves writing coherent and purposeful responses taking into consideration their task and their audience. Best of all, an effectively run PDRJ unit or program can provide the students and the teacher with an enjoyable way to read, respond to and analyze literature.

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